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JANUARY 1927

THE *Illustrated*
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

N.S.E.



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TALES**
and-

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Is the Unwritten Marriage Law Passing?

As Discussed by JUDGE BEN B. LINDSEY



OUT of the hodge-podge of thousands of tangled human relationships, Judge Lindsey has evolved a philosophy so courageous, so removed from old standards—so daring—that the nation is staggered. People, he declares, are making their own rules and laws, to suit their happiness and needs.

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That *Infidelity* is NOT at the root of marital troubles—but lack of fair play and a feeding of green-eyed jealousy.

That Freedom in love affairs, in marriage, leads to a monogamic marriage of itself. You will gasp mentally when you read his article in the December Red Book Magazine—The Moral Revolt; never before has any publication let such frankness go uncensored.

You will wake up to changes in thought and action that are cropping up all about you!

It is a vital issue—and will be thrust into your own life with tremendous force, if it has not entered already. Which side of the fence are you on—have you the courage to agree with Judge Lindsey?

Who understands people in all their pretense and sham, groping and floundering, better than the author, the *real* author who does not exaggerate or color—but who paints word-pictures as true and realistic as any snapshot of life!

And never before have we been able to offer you a group of such popular and beloved writers as in this December Red Book Magazine—authors who write of the people of today with a shrewd, searching understanding that is uncanny in its realism. Such as Rupert Hughes, Owen Johnson, Rita Weiman, Leroy Scott, Virginia Dale, Struthers Burt, Samuel Spewack and others—all names that mean stories that live for you, packed with the pulsating romance of *Life*—its ecstasies and tragedies.

The

RED BOOK
MAGAZINE

for December
PRICE 25 CENTS

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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Frontispiece: "The Cowboy's Calendar—January," by Will James.

A Spirited Short Novel

The Bar E Bar Bandit By Allan Hawkwood 140

A thrill-crammed tale of wild ways and wild days on a remote New Mexico cattle range. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

Short Stories That Are Worth While

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This Colorado drama of the conflict between ranch and farm is by the author of "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin" and "The Black Star." (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

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Chinatown and its strange life here provide material for a typically engaging story by the man who wrote "Fifty Cans of Opium" and "Red Retribution." (Illustrated by William Molt.)

Senónaqua and the Lion By Bigelow Neal 58

A fine tale of wild life by the author of "Captain Jack," "The Field of Amber Gold" and other well-remembered stories. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Ward of the Ship By Stephen Hopkins Orcutt 63

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He was the best rider on the ranch, and so he ventured to compete at the Chicago rodeo; and—much happened to Scandalous Bill. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 84

"The Attack from Moscow" again displays Mr. New's exceptional knowledge of foreign affairs, his fine constructive imagination and his notable ability in building a strong, absorbing story. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Cold Shoulder By Herbert L. McNary 98

This attractive story of a major league ball-player and his strange career is by the author of "The Wolverine" and "The Man with the Glass Jaw." (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

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Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization.

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A perfectly good scheme to convert lettuce leaves into Havana tobacco leads Ed the garage mechanic into variegated difficulties that you will enjoy. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Trail of Death By H. Bedford-Jones 117

"North of Trouville" follows this tragic trail of crime and reprisal to its most exciting episodes. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

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The Great Samarkand By Roy Norton 164

The crisis of this entertaining mystery story by the gifted author of "The Unknown Mr. Kent" and "Toll of the Sea." (Illustrated by William Molt.)

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It isn't easy to explain the mystery of this man's war-time experience.

Jim By A. A. Strachan 193

A homesteader and his dog go through a difficult adventure in this story by a one-time officer of the Canadian Mounted.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

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THERE is no closed season on good stories. In the pages of your favorite magazine you may enjoy baseball in winter or football in the spring; you may join in a fine Arctic adventure in midsummer or thrill to a hunting exploit in May. And fiction travel is as easy and delightful in December as in June.

In this issue, for example, is a great story of baseball, and of very human nature, "The Cold Shoulder," by Herbert McNary. So too "The Bar E Bar Bandit," by Allan Hawkwood, takes you out into the open—to adventures thrilling indeed, on a remote New Mexico cattle range. "The Ward of the Ship," by Stephen Hopkins Orcutt carries you on a lively cruise to South America; Roy Norton's "The Great Samarkand" comes to its dramatic conclusion in Egypt; then "The Blue Satan," a most engrossing mystery story by George Gibbs, brings you nearer home in Pennsylvania. And so on through the long list of stories: each offers you an absorbing drama in a new and interesting place, without limitation of season.

Next month, likewise, will offer an equal reward: "Red Ghosts,"

William H. Hamby's novelette of Arizona, is specially worth watching for—as are the notably fine stories in the "Trail of Death" series by H. Bedford-Jones, in the "Free Lances in Diplomacy" by Clarence Herbert New, and in the "Tales of the Merchant Marine" by Stephen Hopkins Orcutt. The second of the three big installments into which we have divided George Gibbs' "The Blue Satan," moreover, is engrossing indeed.

BESIDES these, Calvin Ball will give us another joyous tale of the inimitable Ed; Lemuel De Bra will present a new Chinatown drama; and other Old Guard writers for The Blue Book Magazine will be represented by their best work. There will be, too, several stories by new writers who deserve a warm welcome; Will James will offer a fine page in his "Cowboy's Calendar;" and five of our readers will, as usual, contribute the stories of their most remarkable real experiences—narratives which lead to the conclusion that modern life is not such a tame affair after all. . . . This coming February issue will be a winning number, we believe; don't overlook it.

—The Editors.



January

Bucking the Drifts

The Cowboy's Calendar—By Will James

"The winter months in the cow country and to the north take in a lot of bucking one thing and then another. In this case it's snow, but the cold winds that bring them snows is not at all faced without a squint; and the cowboy at his work looking out for weaker stock finds January one of the longest and hardest months of the year.

"In this picture it tells some of how the rider is with his horse. The hand on the neck of the pony means 'Steady, boy,' and the same as to show that both man and horse are *together* in the work."

The NESTER

This fine drama of Western life is by the talented author of "The Black Star," "Poetic Injustice," "The Lobster List" and many other well-remembered Blue Book Magazine successes.

By

GEORGE L. KNAPP

UNDER a lone cottonwood, the only tree on the mesa for twenty miles in any direction, was a one-room shack. It had been built of rough lumber many years before, and never had known the touch of paint. The two windows, each composed of a single sash, had more broken panes than whole ones, and the tar-paper roof was faulty. A covered water-barrel stood on the shady side. Fifty feet away, two gray horses were dozing under a shed; a wagon and a sulky plow were standing near; and sitting on the wagon tongue, a man was fitting panes into one of the window sash.

He was nearing thirty; his eyes were hazel in tint; his hair brown and slightly curly; he had a drawn look, as if from a recent illness. But his shoulders were wide, his waist thin, his wrists corded; and anyone looking from those wrists to the close-set ears would have said that he was quite familiar with the inside of a gymnasium. From time to time, as he worked, he glanced at a couple of riders coming from the general direction of the ranch-house; they turned off the main trail to the lone cottonwood, and revealed themselves: a ruddy-faced, white-haired man of sixty, with a long mustache that still showed some of its original red, and a young woman of twenty-four or five, tanned and athletic-looking, riding astride and wearing a cowboy hat on a mass of black hair. They reined up, and the man spoke cheerfully:

"Howdy, stranger!"

"Good morning," returned the young man, removing his hat and rising. "Wont you light?"

"Don't mind if I do," returned the white-haired man. He swung down, and the girl followed. "My name's Judson, Pete Judson; that's my ranch down there on the bottoms. This is my daughter!"

"My name is Burton Ramsey," said the other. "I'm very glad to meet you. Just a moment." He disappeared inside the shack and came out with a kitchen chair and a bench. "Have seats," he said, with a grin in which embarrassment was mixed with defiance. The visitors gravely accepted, and Ramsey seated himself on the wagon tongue.

"Husky span of horses you've got there," said Judson, glancing toward the shed.

"Bought 'em from a brewer in Pueblo," said Ramsey. "Sore-footed from the pavement; they'll be all right here."

"That's a good idea. Fixing up to stay?"

"Yes sir—at least, I hope so. They say I've got to live in this climate for some years, and I can't afford to loaf."

"Lungs? You don't look it."

"Not consumption. Just a bad case of pneumonia that pulled me down and made me short-winded, and the doctors chased me out here on suspicion."

"I see. Well, Colorado'll grow a new set of lungs in anybody that's got half a one left for seed. You haven't put in a pump?"

"No, I've ordered one."

"Get your water at our place till it comes; it's cleaner than the river."

"Thank you, very much. I'll be glad to."

"Mind if I talk turkey, Mr. Ramsey?"

"No, why?"

"I think you'd better wait till you're

better acquainted," said the girl, speaking for the first time since accepting the chair. "When Dad gets on some subjects, he's so energetic about it that a stranger thinks he's trying to pick a row; and we don't want that."

"I don't think I'd misunderstand, Miss Judson," said Ramsey. "Just as you please, though, of course."

"Might as well get down to cases," insisted Judson. "You say you can't afford to loaf. If that's the case, you can't afford to monkey with this dry land."

"Why not? Some have done pretty well, dry farming."

"Not in this part of the country."

"Perhaps—" Ramsey began, and checked himself.

"Perhaps the cattlemen run 'em out, you were going to say," said Judson. "Well, I never did it, though I aint going to deny it's happened. But it aint the main thing. You can't farm here without water. Once in three or four years, you'll make a crop; the rest of the time you wont break even. It's just slow starvation. The Lord meant this for grazing country, and that's all it ever will be till you get it under ditch."

"I know of some men who have done well above the ditch not far from Fort Collins."

"I'll bet even money they aint there three years from now. Besides, they have more rainfall there than here, and not so long a summer to dry out the ground."

RAMSEY made no reply, and after a moment, the girl made another effort to shift the talk.

"You don't come from very far east, do you, Mr. Ramsey?"

"No, Miss Judson. Born a Hoosier, but I've been building railroads up in Minnesota and Dakota the last few years."

"This will seem like a mild climate, after that."

"Yes." He paused a moment, and Judson struck in:

"Mr. Ramsey, I want to buy you out. If I'd had any sense, I'd have picked up this place long ago; but we old longhorns get careless, and it serves me right for some one to slip in ahead of me. I hear you paid about five hundred dollars for this place. Is that somewhere near the truth?"

"Pretty near," said the young man, guardedly.

"All right. If I'd taken pains to find him, I could have got it from the same

fellow for half the price, most likely. I'll give you five hundred for it."

"Why do you want the place, Mr. Judson?" asked the young man.

"It lays right between my land and the Government land. See that draw over there, going up to the second mesa? My cattle go up that, across a corner of your land, except sometimes when they go up past the shack here."

"You don't need to buy the place to get the right for your cattle to go up that draw, Mr. Judson. I came here to make a farm for myself, not to hold anybody up to buy me out. There's no reason why your cattle shouldn't run there, for a good many years, anyway."

"Fair enough, but I'd rather buy. I'll take your horses and tools off your hands, at a fair price, too."

"It's a mighty decent offer, but I don't think I'll sell, Mr. Judson."

"I wont raise the bid."

"I didn't suppose you would. I don't know how to say it very well, but I want to make a home, somewhere, and this looks like a good chance. I'm the first Ramsey for three generations that worked for anybody else, and I've got tired of it."

There was an air of finality to the refusal, and Judson flushed as he rose to his feet. He believed his offer a generous one, he was angry with himself for neglecting to buy the place while he had a chance, and his temper was not helped by the fact that his daughter had urged delay in broaching the subject. He swung into the saddle, and turned to Ramsey:

"You'll be a damn' sight tireder of dry farming before you're through. Dry farming!" The words seemed to irritate him. "Text-book agriculture. Theories of a lot of damn' professors that don't know a steer from a camel!"

"I bought me then a Durham ram and a fine alpaca cow,
A lockstitch Osage-orange hedge, and a patent leather plow,"

he quoted from a current farming satire. "You think this dry farming is a new wrinkle, Mr. Ramsey. Well, it aint. This is the third epidemic of it the country's had, and it'll end just like the rest. I've chipped in twice to keep dry farmers from starving and get 'em back to some place where they could make a living, and by the bloody hindquarters of Balaam's jackass, I reckon I can do it again. My



offer stands, and when you've tried this game long enough to know that it's the only way you'll ever make a profit, let me know. Come, Betsy!"

He bowed stiffly, and rode away. The girl rose. "Be with you in a minute, Dad," she called after him. "Could I trouble you for a drink of water, please?" she asked Ramsey. She drank the lukewarm stuff whose sole merit was wetness, and handed back the dipper with thanks.

"Don't get cross at Dad, Mr. Ramsey," she said. "He's really right about dry farming; nobody's ever made it work around here, and he can't see why that isn't as clear to everybody else as it is to him. He's a mighty good neighbor, though, Mr. Ramsey. Now, please come to our place for that water, just as he said. Good-by!"

Ramsey returned to his glazing; but his thoughts wandered and his fingers bungled till he shook himself angrily, and focused on the task. He busied himself at other repairs and small tasks through the day. Late in the afternoon, he saw something gleaming in the dust of the trail. It was a locket. He could not remember Miss Judson wearing a locket; but it must be hers, and he would have to return it, since she could not guess where she lost it. As well now as any time. He swallowed a hasty supper, staked one horse on fresh ground, mounted the other bareback, and rode down to the Judson ranch.

HE was unused to riding, his horse was a broad-beamed grade Percheron, never designed for a fiery steed; and as he entered the farm inclosure, he knew that he cut an awkward figure. If the ranch hands were laughing at him they had reason. He dismounted stiffly, and spoke to a dried-up-looking man of fifty, with a saddle-colored face that creased into a

A fist caught him on the jaw and the world went out.

friendly smile as he returned Ramsey's greeting.

"Can I see Mr. Judson, please?" asked the young man.

"Why, he's gone to town, partner, but I reckon he'll be back before long. Wont you wait?"

"N-no. Could I speak to Miss Judson?"

"Why, I'm sorry, but she's away, too, gone to a neighbor's. You're the nester that's bought the lone cottonwood place, aint you? Ramsey's the name, aint it? Mine's Willis, Sam Willis, Sammy for short. Anything I can do for you?"

"Why—yes, just as well as anyone, I guess. Mr. Judson and his daughter were up to see me this morning, and a little while ago, I come across this locket, and thought it might be hers—"

"You sure thought right!" exclaimed Sammy, taking the trinket. "My, Miss Betsy'll be glad! She wouldn't lose that for a carload o' steers. You'd better wait an' give it to her."

"No, you can do it. Glad I happened to find it. I'll have to be getting back, now. Good night, Mr. Willis."

"Well, good night, if you must go; but I know they'll both be sorry you didn't wait."

Four or five men had come near during the conversation. One was a tall fellow about Ramsey's own age, with swarthy complexion and bold black eyes, handsome in a coarse, overbearing way. He was looking at Ramsey with a contemptuous grin. Sammy sought to smooth things.

"Mr. Ramsey, this is Mr. Piatt, Lon Piatt, our foreman."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Piatt," said Ramsey. Piatt grunted without offering his hand, looked the smaller man over insultingly and said:

"So, this is the dude that's goin' to learn us longhorns how to farm!"

Ramsey's eyes narrowed, but he did not reply. Piatt went on:

"Say, don't you want somebody to come along an' pick ye up when ye fall off?"

"Thanks, but I can generally pick myself up."

"My, aint he brash! Say, does your maw let ye go out nights?"

"If I keep out of bad company, yes. I must go, now."

A black-eyed youngster of twenty gave a loud guffaw at this, and the others chuckled. Piatt scowled angrily.

"Say, you learn to keep a civil tongue in your head, or you'll get spanked!"

"Yes?" said Ramsey, dropping the horse's reins and stepping a pace closer.

"Were you thinking of taking on the job?"

"If you warn't so damn' scrawny, I'd push your face in!"

"Don't let that stop you. It's only fair to tell you that I know something about boxing, and I don't believe you do."

"Boxing, hell! Put up your mitts. I'm goin' to put a head on you that you can eat hay with!"

THERE are two kinds of beatings that awe a man. One is to be held helpless before superior science and hammered down, inch by inch; and the other is to be knocked out so quickly that he doesn't know how it happened. It was the second kind that happened to Piatt. He rushed, swinging left and right; but one blow went wild and the other was picked out of the air and drawn aside. A piston rod jolt in the pit of the stomach bowed him forward, and almost before he sensed the pain, a bony fist caught him on the point of the jaw, and the world went out. Ramsey looked around; but every face in the circle was grinning happily, for Lon Piatt

was no favorite. Sammy grinned at the victor.

"You've got a punch, Mr. Ramsey."

"Had one before I got sick. It's good enough for that kind of a swine yet."

Piatt stirred, grunted, rolled on his side, and passed a hand over his stomach. A chuckle went round the group, and he looked up, scowling as he saw Ramsey.

"You—" he began, and stopped, seeming to realize for the first time what had happened. A startled look flashed across his face, followed by another scowl.

"I'll get you for this!" he snarled. "I aint goin' to take that from nobody. You wait!"

"I expected to hear that," said Ramsey, coolly. "It's just your size. You're too big a coward to take your medicine after you came begging for it. You're just one big streak of fat, yellow clear through; and the harder you work at letting me alone, the better your health'll be. Good night, folks."

He nodded to the group, led his horse to the gate, jumped on, careless now of appearances, and rode away.

A week passed after the encounter with Piatt without an incident to relieve the monotony of hard, grinding work. Then one evening, as he was dressing a rabbit for supper, a man rode down from the upper mesa to the south.

"Howdy, stranger," said the newcomer.

"How do you do?" returned Ramsey, looking him over. He was lank and sal-low, with a straggling mustache, a week's growth of thin beard, overlong rusty black hair, a gap-toothed grin and a general air of unfamiliarity with the wash basin; but Ramsey was lonely and he knew that the claims of hospitality in the West are strong. "Just in time for supper," he said. "Jump down."

"Don't care if I do," said the other. "You're this chap Ramsey they're talkin' 'bout, aint you?"

"My name's Ramsey. I didn't know anyone was talking about me."

"Well, they be. 'Bout how you walloped that big stiff, Lon Piatt. Gosh, he's sore! Everybody's laughin'. I'm Jim Bowser. What's your front handle?"

"Burt, for my mother's name, Burton. B-u-r-t."

"Unhunh! Spellin' don't count 'ith me. Never knowed but one chap named Bert, an' he stole a hoss off'm me. Got papers for this place?"

"Yes."

"Or't to be able to squeeze a good lay out o' ol' Jud, if he don't set his hands to run ye off. I'm sellin' to the Fryin' Pan. Them an' Judson's plumb hosstyle. They're the biggest, though."

He stayed till nearly midnight; eating mightily, talking constantly, spitting promiscuously. He was a typical piece of poor white trash drifted West, and not improved by travel. When at last he left, Ramsey heaved a sigh of relief, and sat down to classify the information which the gangling he-gossip had left behind.

BOWSER was a nester. He had homesteaded on Turkey Draw, wherever that might be, and was going to turn over his place to a cattle company whose brand was a frying-pan. He had taken up the place to sell—a sort of near-blackmail that helped Ramsey understand why nesters are not popular with cattlemen. But the cattle interests of that county were not the unit which they seemed to outsiders. There was sharp cleavage between the individual ranchers, of whom Judson was a type, and companies like the Frying Pan; and Bowser hinted that Lon Piatt was as much at home in one camp as in the other.

Two days later, Ramsey was unhitching at noon when a wagon turned up toward the cottonwood, and bumped along the rough trail with a vast clanging. "Hello, neighbor!" called the driver as he approached.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Willis," said Ramsey, wondering.

"Better make it Sammy an' let me call you Burt," said the older man. "I've plum' forgot how to handle this mister business. Your pump's come, an' I brung it out for you."

"Why—what—" Burt stared and stammered. "I'm much obliged, but I didn't expect anything like that."

"Jest as easy to bring it as to come an' tell you it's here," said Sammy. "'Sides, a pump's a mighty mean thing to handle alone. Thought I might's well help you put it in."

"You're awfully good, and I appreciate it," said Ramsey. "But wont Mr. Judson—"

"Nix," said Sammy, laughing. "He told me to do it. He's the friendliest old cuss in four counties. You riled him, not wantin' to sell, an' I reckon he riled you,

some; but he'd ride all night through a blizzard to help you if you needed it."

"His foreman wouldn't."

"No. Gosh-all-hemlock! He was the surprisedest bird! If that's the kind of a kick you've got when you're jest gettin' over bein' sick, I'd plum' hate to rattle you when you're feelin' peart. You needn't pay any 'tention to Lon's bluff about gettin' you. That's just hot air."

"I put it down for that. We'll eat before we tackle that pump. I knocked over a grouse with the rifle this morning. Doesn't it smell good?" He nodded to where a kettle simmered over what was left of an open fire.

"Suits me," said Sammy. "That reminds me: Miss Betsy says to thank you ever so much for that locket, an' both of 'em want you to come down soon for a visit."

They ate dinner and then put in the pump. It took them some hours, and Burt felt that he never could have done it alone. The water from the old well was clear and surprisingly cool. Then Sammy looked over the place, pointed out where a "drift fence" would keep cattle off the plowed land at a minimum of cost, and generally gave good counsel, though frankly saying that in his judgment, dry farming was foredoomed to failure.

"How'd you come to meet Mason, anyway?" he asked.

"Mason?" Ramsey's look was blank.

"Gosh!" said Sammy, staring. "I hope you aint been stung wuss'n I thought. This was Mason's place. Who'd you buy it of?"

"A man named Sikes. He bought it from Mason, I remember, now. I looked up the transfer."

"Sikes? Chap with bugged-out eyes an' a lot o' dewlap?"

"Exactly," said Ramsey, laughing. "What's the matter?"

"Why, nothin's the matter, if you've got your title clear," answered Sammy, plainly evading the question. "'Bout Lon, now, he's liable to be a mean *hombre*. You kin lick him with one hand, but if you ketch him in any monkey business, I'm askin' you, as a favor, to let me know."

Ramsey agreed, Sammy repeated the invitation to call, and drove away, leaving a puzzled young man behind him. Why was Sammy surprised that Mason had sold to Sikes? Why had he spoken immediately afterward of Lon Piatt? Burt mulled

over the matter fruitlessly till bedtime, and then, when undressing, straightened with a jerk.

"So that's it!" he said. "Sikes and Piatt're in cahoots. They buy out Mason, say for two hundred dollars, sell it to me for five hundred, then Piatt runs me out, and Sikes buys it back for a song! Well, I think I can spike that game!"

He called at the ranch-house a few evenings later, walking, because he did not like the figure he made riding bareback. Judson received him cordially.

"Wish you'd come in time for supper," said the old cattleman. "Haven't you got room for a bite? No? Well, I'm glad you come, anyway. Betsy's gone to Florence, to the wedding of one of her classmates—I tell her it's about time she was thinking of a wedding of her own. Mart—that's my boy, you haven't met him—he goes to the mining school in Golden and they've sent him to California this vacation to get a little practical experience. He'll be home a few weeks before school starts. That leaves Sammy and me millin' round the corral alone."

RAMSEY spent a pleasant evening, listening to stories of early days. When he insisted on leaving, he found two saddled horses at the porch, with the black-eyed young cowboy mounting one of them.

"No use walkin' when these brutes loaf," said Judson. "Ben'll ride with you and bring 'em back. Make him think he's been to a dance."

"Boss," said Ben, cutting across Ramsey's protest, "when I go to a dance, I don't get back till mornin'—or later."

"I'm sorry to bother you," said Ramsey, as they rode. "I could have walked just as well."

"Man don't look right, walkin', in this country," said Ben. "Don't worry none about me. I'd go to Denver to see Lon Piatt get another like the one you give him. Katy, bar the door!" He laughed aloud in the starlight. "That's the best I ever see."

"Just a trick," said Ramsey. "Say, do you know a man named Sikes?"

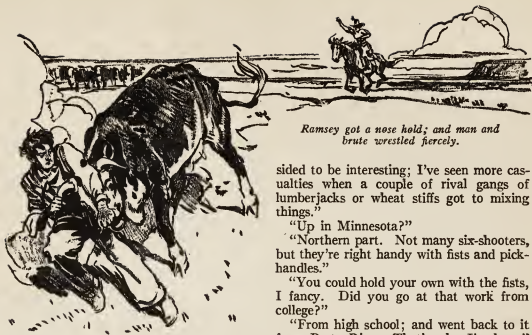
"Sure. Him an' Lon used to be thick-er'n thieves. He's kind o' herdin' with the Fryin' Pan outfit."

So, thought Ramsey. The dirty bit of sharp practice might be designed to cheat Judson as well as himself.

He worked doggedly. His health and strength were improving, and that made for optimism. But he was just beginning to realize that he had staked every dollar his illness had left in a game with the cards stacked against him. Raising grain by the dry farming method is beautifully simple—in theory. Turn the sod in summer, leaving it rough to catch and hold the moisture of fall and winter. Cultivate to a good seed bed in spring, planting early and deep, and harrowing to cover the ground with a dust mulch that stops evaporation. After the first crop, let the land lie fallow for a year to gather moisture for a second planting. It sounds well. But the man who tries dry farming without cattle and capital is inviting failure, even now, and at the beginning of this century, the odds were heavier still.

Ramsey was digging post holes for his drift fence one day. A number of Judson's cattle were grazing near. All were grade Herefords, with red bodies, white faces and sharp horns—almost as standardized as flivvers are today. A young cow wandered toward the worker, and stopped to stare. She came closer, and halted for another unfriendly look; another fifty yards, another halt. Ramsey looked up, unsuspectingly, walked back to take sights and make sure that he was digging in line, and the cow charged.

IN fiction, the hero never is bothered by such a trifle. He knows ju-jitsu, the differential calculus, the table of atomic weights and the genealogy of Moses; and thus equipped, he steps lightly aside, tweaks the charging animal's nose, and the creature obligingly stands on its head. In fact, bulldogging an active young cow without a running start from horseback is a trick that an experienced man can do about once in twenty times—with good luck. Ramsey dodged the rush, caught one horn, was dragged off his feet, regained them, got a nose hold; and man and brute wrestled fiercely as he tried to guide the tussle toward the spade. He heard a shout, but it sounded faint and far off. His wind was going, but he worked a few feet past the spade, let go nose and horn, and jumped back. As the cow turned to renew the attack, he jabbed the spade savagely in her face and swung the flat on her barrel with a resounding whack. Then a figure on horseback dashed up with a yell, a quirt lashed out, and the cow bolted.



Ramsey got a nose hold; and man and brute wrestled fiercely.

Elizabeth Judson reined her horse and jumped to the ground.

"Are you hurt?" she asked. Ramsey shook his head, and spoke, panting:

"No. Thank you. I wonder—"

"These range cattle don't know a man on foot," she explained. "Sure you're not hurt?"

"Sure. You were just in time. Sorry I had to look like a fool."

"Nonsense. You'd won the fight. Sometimes the herd rushes, though. I'll fog 'em away while you rest a minute."

She turned competently to the task while Ramsey recovered his breath and his hat. "That's better," she said, as she came back. "I brought you a few things from the ranch—better put 'em in the well to keep cool. And I've never thanked you for the locket."

"No thanks needed." He was walking toward the shack with the girl riding beside. "I had a pleasant call," he said, mischievously.

"I heard about it," she laughed. "I'd be sorry, only it was sure to come. Lon's a born bully."

"If he'd seen that cow wiping me over the landscape, he'd have felt revenged. Miss Judson, this is too much. You folks mustn't board me, you know. Fresh corn, butter, a jug of buttermilk—what can a poor nester do to get even? Unless you like rabbits! I'm a pretty fair shot."

"So Sammy says. He thinks you've been a soldier."

"I was, in Porto Rico. It was too one-

sided to be interesting; I've seen more casualties when a couple of rival gangs of lumberjacks or wheat stiffs got to mixing things."

"Up in Minnesota?"

"Northern part. Not many six-shooters, but they're right handy with fists and pick-handles."

"You could hold your own with the fists, I fancy. Did you go at that work from college?"

"From high school; and went back to it from Porto Rico. That's why I'm here."

"Reason enough; but Colorado will set you on your feet. You're looking a lot better. I must hurry—it's going to rain."

"You'll be caught halfway. Wait till it's over. I'll take your mare to the shed."

A FEW big drops splashed as he ran back to the shack, and in five minutes more, the rain was pouring. They watched the storm through the open door, which happened to be on the lee side.

"Pretty good shower for an arid climate," said the girl.

"Yes. It will make plowing easier. You've been to college, haven't you?" he asked, abruptly.

"State university. Dad believes in education."

"He's a mighty nice old gentleman. I like him."

"He likes you. He wants to buy you out, but he admires you for trying to stick it through. It's a hard tussle."

"I'm beginning to see that. Miss Judson, would it embarrass your father if the Frying Pan people got hold of this place?"

"It would make life a nuisance, though I think we'd survive. Why? Have they been trying to buy?"

"No. I fancy they counted on getting it without buying—at least, without buying it from me."

He laid the facts before her, and she whistled.

"You're right, except on one thing," she said. "They bought this to hold up Dad; then you happened along; and they

thought they saw two bits of easy money instead of one. Of course Lon's in it. He's a sneak as well as a bully; but it's useless to tell Dad that till we've got more evidence. I might put Sammy wise, though."

"I've a guess he's wise already. Is he your father's partner?"

"Partly. He's got a stake outside, but he likes to putter on a ranch and doesn't want the care of one alone. What a dirty trick!"

"It wont work. Piatt can't run me off, and if I have to go, I wont sell to anyone but your father."

"Thank you. Dad wont let you lose on it."

"I don't mean—"

"I know you don't, but you're not the only one who's got some pride in square dealing. The rain's stopped. I'm glad it kept me to hear this, but now I'll be going."

She rode away. Ramsey hitched up and plowed till dark.

HE had no further trouble with the cattle—they were kept at a distance. He finished setting posts for his drift fence and began to string wires, working alone. In a couple of hours, Sammy dismounted beside him and took a hand, cussing mildly because he had not been notified. Ramsey found it hard to voice his thanks, and told himself that if he did succeed, it would be owing to the help of neighbors from whom he had expected nothing but opposition.

Two weeks later, he drove to town, twelve miles away, to get some supplies. Before he had been there fifteen minutes, he encountered Sikes. With him was a sallow, smallish man, with slick hair and unwholesomely white, delicate hands.

"Hello, Ramsey!" said Sikes. "Meet Mr. Case." Ramsey knew Case at once for a professional card sharp whom he had seen in Minnesota five years before; but Case did not recognize Ramsey, and the latter did not claim acquaintance. "How's dry farming?" went on Sikes.

"All right," said Ramsey. Sikes fingered his dewlap.

"I got a customer wants a ranch like yours," he said. "I'll give you a profit if you want to sell."

"How much of a profit?"

"I might get you three hundred dollars. That's purty good for the time you've been there."

"Not good enough."

"I might work 'em a shade higher."

"You haven't even made a start. Don't try to buy that ranch until you're ready to talk real money." He nodded curtly, and left.

THE day was hot, and Ramsey decided to wait and drive home after dark. The through train from the west stopped, discharged a few passengers, among them a handsome lad of twenty with a queer hat; and puffed out again. The sun touched the rim of the mountains, the air cooled, and Ramsey went into the principal saloon for a stein of beer before starting.

The boy was there, now about half drunk. There was something vaguely familiar about his face. Case was talking to him in a low tone; but he answered for all the room to hear:

"Little game—jus' suits me. But—aint got the money. No more—n forty dollars. Jus'—chicken feed."

Case scowled at the publicity; but when he spoke, his voice was smooth, though again Ramsey could not catch the words. Again the lad's reply made the conversation plain:

"Says he'll—trus' me! Mis'er Case—'ll trus' me! Ain' that the limit? Feller may be down—but he ain' out—while frien'—'ll trus' him! I got—damn' good notion to take him up!"

It was none of Ramsey's affair, but he was still young enough to rush in where angels fear to tread, and he was boiling angry. He walked down the bar, stepped between the youth and the gambler, and spoke in tones of icy contempt:

"So, that's your game, is it? Same one they run you out of Brainerd for. Get a boy drunk and then fleece him in a poker-game! You—louse!" And he threw his beer in Case's face.

It saved his life. A man cannot shoot with his eyes full of beer, and by the time Case had wiped his eyes, a big six-shooter had appeared on the bar, pointing at no one in particular and everyone in general, and the bartender spoke.

"I don't like beer spilled on my floor, stranger. If my goods don't suit you better'n that, you'd best go home. You too, Martin. Al, I want to talk to you about something, if you'll wait."

The gambler leaned sullenly against the bar and waited while Ramsey and Martin

Judson went to the former's wagon, and drove away.

Sammy rode over next day to bring his own and Miss Judson's thanks, and to say that Judson pere did not know of the mischance. "Co'se he'll hear of it sometime," said Sammy, "but maybe not till Mart's gone back to school. The kid aint learnt how to carry liquor, an' when he's got a few drinks in him, he'll gamble for his shirt.

ly, cracked, and the foreman's hat went spinning from his head. He raised his hands with a jerk.

"That's better! Reach down your left hand, take out that gun, and drop it. Good. Now, tell your men to herd those cattle out of my plowed ground the way they went in—and do it damned quick!"

Piatt's voice choked as he gave the order. The tables were turned with a vengeance,



A red flame leaped out at him and he felt himself falling.

But he's a mighty fine boy, just the same. Say, what you done to give Lon a fresh grouch at you?"

"Nothing—except refuse to sell the place back to Sikes."

"I reckon that's it," said Sammy, grinning.

DEVELOPMENTS in Piatt's fresh grouch came quickly. Ramsey saw him one morning, with Ben and another helper, rounding up cattle on the second mesa to drive to the home ranch. Normally, they would have gone down the draw nearly half a mile to the east; but the next thing Ramsey knew, they were pouring down the trail past the shack, and he heard the wires snap as they went through the fence and out on the plowed ground. He looked to the magazine of his rifle and stepped to the door as Piatt came riding up, an evil smile on his bold face. The next split second, he was looking into the muzzle of the rifle.

"Put up your hands!" commanded Ramsey.

"What do you mean?" blustered Piatt, surprised at the quick action, but making no move to obey. The rifle shifted slight-

and he knew that his men were laughing at him. They brought the cattle from the field back to the second mesa, and turned them eastward. Then Ben rode back to the shack.

"Thanks, Ben," said Ramsey. "Piatt, get down!"

"What do you want?" There was no answer in words, but the rifle, held at the ready, leaped to the shoulder, and Piatt fairly tumbled from his horse. Behind him, Ben was shaking with laughter.

"Get those tools!" Ramsey pointed. "So. Now, you'll mend that fence."

"I wont!" yelled Piatt. His face was purple and he was almost foaming. The rifle spoke again and he jumped two feet in the air and came down, staggering. The bullet had knocked off a spur.

"I'm not so good a shot as I was," said Ramsey. "I meant that to take off your French heel. However, I can hit the main target. Get those tools!"

Piatt gathered up pliers and stretcher. The blood had left his face, and he stammered as he pleaded:

"I—can't do it—alone!"

"You'll do it alone unless your men choose to help you. I sha'n't ask them to.

They're white, Mr. Judson's white; but you're a dirty yellow cur! March!"

He marched. Ben took pity on him and helped mend the fence. Ramsey broke the revolver, took out the shells, and returned the empty gun.

"Here. If I ever find you on my land again, I'll shoot first and inquire afterward. If any dirty work is done here when I'm away, I sha'n't ask who did it. I'll lay it to you, and act accordingly. Now, get!"

THE Judsons were on the other side of the river, buying stock. Piatt went to the ranch, gathered his belongings, wrote a note asking that his check be sent to him in town, and left before the family returned. He knew that he could keep no authority over men who had twice seen him baffled and humiliated by a tenderfoot. Judson heard the tale that night with incredulity which vanished only when Elizabeth and Sammy put in their oars. Even then, he refused to credit one charge.

"Lon's a bully, I know; he's been meaner'n mud to Burt, and got just what was coming to him. I don't blame Burt a bit. But Lon Piatt aint in any deal to get that ranch for the Frying Pan and box us off the range unless we go way round. I knew that boy's father."

"So did I," said Sammy. "Never knew much good of him, neither." But Judson would not be convinced.

The fall passed. With as much of his own land turned as he could plant the next spring, Ramsey plowed for others until stopped by freezing ground. It added something to his small capital; but he worried much, for the usual fall rains were lacking. He found local politics rather puzzling. Judson was reelected state senator, though by a reduced majority, but the new sheriff was hand picked by a few cattle outfits, with the Frying Pan at the head. Elizabeth tried to explain.

"Dad farms as well as raises stock," she said. "The Frying Pan wants to run cattle in the old way, without raising feed, and tries to hog the range to do it. Dad votes for schools and roads, and they kick about taxes. They're bound to lose in the end, but they can make a lot of trouble for a while, if they try."

"And you think they'll try?"

"Looks that way. Wish I could make Dad realize that Lon's knifing him; but I can't. Martin doesn't see it, either."

Ramsey ate Christmas dinner with the Judsons, and went back to his shack, aching with what he called homesickness, though his home had been the nearest hat peg for ten years. New Year's day, Judson left for Denver, and the day afterward, Ramsey went to town. In the course of the forenoon, he met Sikes.

"Dry farmin's purty dry, aint it?" asked the latter.

"Lots of time for snow yet," returned Ramsey.

"Mebbe. Step in a minute. I got a proposition to make."

"Yes?"

"I want to buy you out."

"So you said before."

"I got a good proposition this time." Sikes pulled at his dewlap and his bulging eyes were restless. Ramsey grinned.

"Look here, Sikes, lay the cards on the table. Somebody's told you he'll give so much for my land, and you're trying to figure how much of the price you can keep for yourself. Well, you can't keep any of it. We don't do business till you tell me two things. First, what's your price—and remember there's no chance to raise the ante."

Sikes gulped and flushed, but could see no way around. "Price is ten dollars an acre," he said. "Four, five times what it's worth, too."

"Maybe. Now, who's your principal?"

"I don't see that makes any difference."

"We don't do business till I know. Suit yourself."

"Well, if you must know, it's Tolliver."

"Vice-president of the company that owns the Frying Pan. I thought so. Tell Mr. Tolliver my place isn't for sale."

OUTSIDE, he met Sammy, and the two headed for the hotel for dinner. They encountered Bowser, who gave a shamefaced answer to their greeting and hurried away.

"Wonder what that coyote's doin' in town," said Sammy.

The new sheriff was in the hotel lobby when they came from the dining-room, followed them out, and called to them as they turned up the street together.

"Howdy, Sammy," he said. "Mr. Ramsey, I got a warrant for you."

"Warrant? What for?"

"Rustlin'. That's what they say, anyhow; I aint the jury."

"Do you mean that I'm accused of steal-

ing cattle?" Ramsey's eyes were blazing, but Sammy laid a hand on his arm.

"I'll 'tend to this, Burt. Now, what's this damn' foolishness?"

"Why, they claim he knocked over a doggy for the Frying Pan. Say they found the hide."

"Who says so? Keep still, Burt!"

"Jim Bowser swears to the complaint."

"An' you arrest a decent man on the word o' that pack-rat?"

"I got to do it, Sammy. If he aint guilty—"

"You know damn' well he aint guilty! Burt, has that gang tried to buy you out again lately?"

"Sikes tried this forenoon."

"Plain enough. First coax an' then drive. All right. Reckon I'm good for bail. Where do we get it?"

"Why, I got to go over the river—"

"I don't blame you for wantin' to hide after a job like this, but the first thing you're goin' to do is take us where we can fix bail—or I'll wire Jud an' he'll visit the governor!"

The sheriff gave in, but there were delays, and red tape, and it was two hours before Ramsey was free, and the embarrassed sheriff hurried away.

"Thanks, Sammy. Now I'll look for Mr. Bowser!" said Ramsey.

"An' get pinched again? Not much, you wont. He's just a tool. Chances are they caught him with the doggy an' let him go if he'd swear it onto you. You're comin' home with me, soon's I can find Mart. He stayed at Brennan's last night, was to meet me here today, an' go up to Golden this evening—I brung his things. What is it, Mac?"

The bartender whose beer Ramsey had thrown in Case's face beckoned Sammy aside and spoke for a minute in low tones. The cattleman turned back with grim face.

"They've got Mart," he said. "Lon roped him, got a few drinks down him, started a game, an' they rung in that Case chap you soaked last summer. They're over Reagan's saloon. I'm goin' to get him. You wait at the hotel."

"I see myself waiting. Wish I had a revolver, though."

"Glad you aint. I'm packin' my six-gun but I don't look to use it. If we go through the poolroom, they may not spot us."

The poolroom was empty, and moved

by a sudden impulse, Ramsey caught up a couple of billiard balls in each hand. They climbed the back stairs, listened, and threw open a door. Martin, Case, Piatt and two men whom Ramsey did not know were seated around a table with cards and chips, and most of the chips were before Case. Martin was ghastly pale, the liquor was wearing off and he was beginning to realize his plight. Piatt scowled:

"What you chaps buttin' in for?"

"Mart knows, I reckon," said Sammy. "This aint what Betsy thinks you're doin', Mart."

The boy half rose, stifling a sob. Case laid his cards on the table and dropped his hands in his lap. Piatt spoke again:

"Aw, hell! His sister's fell for that damn' dude—"

The billiard ball caught Piatt squarely on the nose, and ruined it forever. Case's hand came up with a revolver, a second ball missed, but Martin caught the gambler's arm. Ramsey rushed, a red flame leaped out at him, a blow seemed to shatter his shoulder, and he felt himself falling.

HE struggled back to consciousness, numb and woozy and with a consuming thirst, felt some ice on his tongue, and went to sleep again. Hours later he roused once more and lay with eyes closed. He heard light footsteps in his room, a murmur of female voices, the closing of a door; felt a hand on his forehead, and looked up at Elizabeth Judson.

"Betsy," he muttered. "Yes, Burt," she answered. He tried to reach for her hand, but his arm would not move, and with a start, he came broad awake.

"Sammy—Martin—" he exclaimed thickly. "Are they—"

"Both all right," she answered. "I think Martin's cured, too. We never can thank you enough."

"I didn't do anything," he returned.

"Case is in the hospital, but he'll get well," she went on. "Dad knows Lon Piatt for what he is, at last. Lon's skipped. Dad says he'll give you whatever Sikes offered you, cash, and double it if you'll come in partners with him. We—I—hope—"

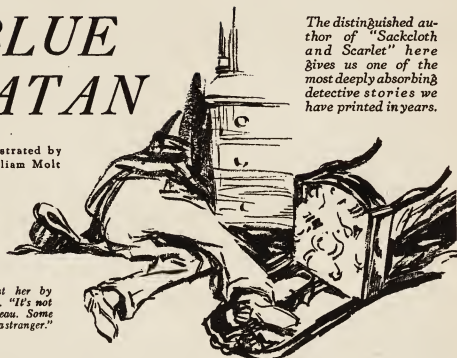
"I'm hoping, too, Betsy," he said.

The nurse opened the door, stared for a second, closed it softly, and tiptoed away. They did not hear her, and their whispered words had nothing to do with dry farming.

The BLUE SATAN

Illustrated by
William Molt

*He caught her by
the elbow. "It's not
Mr. Trudeau. Some
one else—a stranger."*



By
GEORGE GIBBS

The distinguished author of "Sackcloth and Scarlet" here gives us one of the most deeply absorbing detective stories we have printed in years.

ROCK aroused himself, like one awaking from the dead. He stared at the ceiling, slowly struggling to consciousness, grinned at the patch of light on his work-table near the window, aware that he had slept as he had not slept for weeks. He swung on an elbow and then upright, staring bewildered at his trousered legs and muddy boots. He remembered now. He had taken a long walk just before dusk, trying to solve a problem—a situation in his new mystery story that had baffled him for days. He tried to recall if anything constructive had come out of his physical exercise, but his mind seemed to be as blank this morning as when the nerve-crash had come six weeks ago.

As the blood surged into his head again, he was aware of the old obsession that the new book would not fulfill the promise of "A Leap in the Dark." He had been a fool to go on with the new book against the orders of Dr. Ordway the nerve specialist who had sent him up here to his Aunt Julia's little cottage in the Alleghenies, where simple food, clean air and release from the mad rush of the city would bring

the quiet that his frazzled nerves demanded. God knows he had wanted to rest! But his brain had refused to obey the needs of his weary body. Only violent physical exercise brought him brief moments of relaxation and the blessed sleep that saved him from another collapse.

It was with the object of becoming completely exhausted that he had gone late yesterday afternoon to roam the hills with a shotgun in search of game, and had only succeeded in thinking more desperately of his work—a new scheme for the book that seemed to have possibilities. What was that scheme? Curious that he couldn't recall it now. Something to do with a drug and its effect. . . . No. The thought would not return. He got up, wandered over to the table, wondering if he had made a note of it, but there was nothing on the manuscript.

Yesterday he had thought of destroying the book, but now he turned away frowning, and slowly took off his clothing, preparing for a bath. He must have been completely exhausted to tumble on the bed with all his clothes on. There was the



shotgun in the corner by the fireplace, and the old yellow shooting-jacket hanging from a hook in the closet. He had been so weary that he could not remember what had happened when he came in, except seeing the bed. Aunt Julia had probably come in silently during the night and turned out the light, leaving him sleeping fully clothed rather than taking the risk of waking him.

But he had slept! He had slept many hours. And though his brain now quickly resumed its leaping from thought to thought, he fancied that it did not leap so nimbly. His nerves, too, seemed more quiet. He shaved, bathed and dressed, not in his rough clothing, but in a linen shirt and flannel trousers, as though hoping thus to complete his physical regeneration.

"It was mighty good you managed to get to sleep at last, Joe," said Aunt Julia at the breakfast-table as she brought him his eggs and coffee.

"'Knit the raveled sleeve of care.' Well, I'll say so. Poor Aunt Julia! I made a mess of your clean counterpane. That's what you get for playing the good Samaritan to a nut."

"Well," said Aunt Julia, her wide, placid smile reproaching him, "so long as you *did* sleep at last, Joe." She brushed an imaginary crumb from the table. "Things were getting to a pretty pass," she went on

scornfully. "You know, I don't take much stock in these newfangled doctors. If you hadn't got your sleep last night, Joe, I'd made up my mind to put some drops of laudanum into your coffee."

"Laudanum!"

Brock leaped from his chair, almost upsetting his coffee-cup.

"Laudanum! That was it!" He put his hand to his eyes, and then turned toward her, frowning and shaking his head.

"No. It wasn't laudanum. But it was something about a drug—in coffee, the day before the killing—"

"There you go again! That story—"

"I've got to get it," he muttered.

She laid an arm soothingly around his shoulders.

"There, there, Joe," she said. "Now you just sit and finish your breakfast." She pushed him gently back into his chair and filled his coffee-cup. "I'm going to burn that manuscript if you don't stop working on it."

"I wish to God you would," he muttered with feeling.

He ate moodily, but still thinking. A drug that had the effect he wanted. He must find that out. Old man Trudeau's library would help him there. A drug that soothed, obliterated the sense of moral responsibility. Heroin, perhaps. No. That wouldn't do. Nothing so stimulating.

There must be something else—something Oriental. Those fellows knew. He'd go and talk to Emile Trudeau.

TRUDEAU'S place, "Castle Rock," they called it, adjoined Aunt Julia's, but the houses were a quarter of a mile apart. Brock went out on the porch, lighting his pipe. It was a dour day. A rain had fallen during the night, and the atmosphere was still soaked almost to the point of precipitation. The world was weeping with him. He went down the walk and out into the highroad.

He wondered if he would find old Trudeau in a good humor. Queer old bird, moody, suspicious and irascible, kindly at one moment and on the verge of violence at the next. Brock had managed in some way to win past the barriers of the old man's reserve, a feat most astonishing to Julia Magruder, who had lived next door to the Frenchman for five years and never had a word out of him. Aunt Julia did not like the man. There was something strange about him. Other old residents of Laurel and Northampton thought so too. Trudeau had been even more exclusive since his wife had died, but there was a girl, Mrs. Trudeau's niece, now away somewhere at college, of whom Aunt Julia spoke with pleasant friendliness.

Some sort of natural affinity had brought Brock and Trudeau together. And Brock's talks with the old Frenchman in the little library upstairs were the result of a revolt of two keen intelligences against the hopeless commonplace of their other neighbors. It was, therefore, with the privileges of this brief but intimate acquaintance that Brock went up the drive of the old house in the hope of finding some solution of the puzzling problem that confronted him.

Castle Rock looked more forbidding than ever under the leaden sky, a two-story stone house with a mansard roof, a cupola of wood over the main building, the kitchen and sheds trailing aimlessly in the direction of the chicken-yard—a drab spot in a drab landscape, solitary, unfriendly and unfriended, still possessing vestiges of the grandeur of a forgotten era, but now an architectural derelict awaiting only complete decay or the torch to reduce it to the elements from which it had come.

The tops of the evergreen trees nodded in the gathering breeze, giving the visitor a dismal greeting. Why was it that Brock felt a sense of oppression, almost of re-

pulsion, as he drew near the porch? Nerves! With an effort he shook off the moment of discomfort and mounted the steps. There was no sound, except the tinkling of the bell in some deep recess of the house, nor, as he waited, any sound of the footsteps of the old man's only factotum and servant. Brock's need seemed to grow more urgent with this denial, so he went impatiently around the house to the kitchen door. It was open. He knocked, but there was no reply. He waited a moment and then wandered out to the woodshed and chicken-houses. There was no one about. Returning to the kitchen door, he knocked and called again more loudly this time. He thought the silence strange, for the Frenchman never went off the place. He was an early riser, whose habits went by the clock, and the negro servant's were as regular.

The visitor, still listening, was on the point of turning away in disappointment, when something in the quality of the silence in reply to his commotion made him push the kitchen door wider open. The place was sullen, resentful of intrusion. Strange impression—nerves again, of course! He went into the kitchen, still listening intently and staring around. The kettle was singing on the range; there was an odor of food recently cooked, the evidences of its preparation. Brock smiled more confidently as he walked toward the dining-room door. He again called aloud the old man's name and then paused, shocked by the flatness of his own voice in its impact on the silence. It was a tangible thing, this silence, like a curtain stretched before him, or like utter darkness.

But impressionable as he knew he was, curiosity dominated, and he opened the dining-room door. The table was set for one. On a dish were two fried eggs and several pieces of bacon, and beside the dish was a cup of coffee, still warm, all giving forth the pleasant odors that he had noticed. Perhaps old Trudeau had been called and then gone to sleep again. But then, where was Johnson, the colored man?

Keenly aroused and puzzled at the sudden desertion of the house, Brock went out into the dim hallway, peering up the stairs, wondering if his acquaintance with the old man warranted the intrusion of his bedroom at this hour of the morning. At the head of the stairs there was a window which threw a cool light over the tips of the treads. Halfway up there was some-

thing on the stair, something dark, reddish in color. He went up, the stairs creaking and complaining. The object that he had seen from below was a red bandana handkerchief—Trudeau's. Brock picked it up and examined it curiously. There was a dark stain on it. The red bandana handkerchief seemed to indicate to Brock a definite duty, and after a moment of hesitation he went up, hurrying along the upper passage toward the library. The door was closed. Here again, silence. He knocked and called, again aware of a growing excitement in the venture—then opened the door and entered.

The room was bathed in a dirty amber shadow from the brown shade at the window, but a pallid light trickled along the sill until it was absorbed into the shadows, suggesting rather than revealing an unusual condition within the room. Brock moved quickly to the window, and carried by the momentum of his impulse, drew up the shade, flooding the room with the pallid reflections of the somber day. His glance shot eagerly here and there. Papers were scattered on the floor; a chair was overturned; a corner of the Turkish rug was twisted, signs of disorder and of violence. And protruding from the murkiness behind the book-shelves to his left, a shadow that he had instinctively avoided now took form and substance, the feet and legs of a man sprawled in one of the ingenuous dislocations of death.

Brock's first impulse was to rush from the room and downstairs to give the alarm; but when he reached the door, he remembered the silence that had answered his summons. And a morbid interest held him. He turned back into the room. Trudeau? He stared fascinated and came nearer, bending over the body. The boots were of patent leather, mud-stained, but the gray tweed of the trousers, neatly creased, did not suggest the untidiness of the Frenchman.

BROCK turned on the light of the lamp, illuminating the shadow where the man had fallen. A black stain upon one side of his face had spread to the flooring and disappeared under an edge of the rug. But the dead man was not Trudeau. He had a full shock of grizzled brown hair; the face was clean-shaven, the eye-sockets deep, the nose small and sharply pointed. The mouth had sagged open unpleasantly, and death had accentuated a kind of mild

viciousness in the whole physiognomy. Brock touched the dead man's fingers and then straightened, bewildered; for the body was already cold. Who had killed him? And where was old man Trudeau? The mystery deepened, but he was reminded suddenly of his anomalous position, that he was not Joe Brock, the special reporter on a metropolitan newspaper, but merely a visitor in this country community who had stumbled by accident upon a dead body, and at the present moment an actual intruder between a crime and the local police, who should at once be notified. He had been so intent upon his examination of the room that he did not hear the light patter of running feet upon the stairway. And before he could reach the door into the passage, a girl stood in the opening.

"It's Judy, Uncle Emile," she said breathlessly. "I'm here. I—"

The blue eyes of the intruder had been bright with anticipation, her cheeks warmly flushed from the open air and the excitement of her arrival. But at the sight of the sober face of the man before her she stood still, poised uncertainly, a hesitant hand grasping for the support of the door-jamb.

"My uncle—" she gasped haltingly, still staring at Brock. From where she stood, she could not see what lay in the shadow of the bookcases beyond the table, but he saw her eyes, slowly distending, make a quick appraisal of the disorderly room, as a glimmering of the truth that she read in Brock's eyes sent the color out of her cheeks and back to her heart.

"I'm a neighbor. I just got here. Something dreadful has happened," he said firmly. "You must not—"

"Uncle Emile! He's hurt, injured—"

"No," said Brock quickly. "Mr. Trudeau isn't here."

"Then what—" she gasped in relief. She had taken a pace into the room, and as she glanced past him he saw her eyes suddenly distended with horror. She closed her eyes for a moment and then thrust forward.

But he caught her by the elbow, interposing: "It's not Mr. Trudeau. Some one else—a stranger."

She stopped, her glance fluttering like a frightened bird from one object to another.

"You mustn't see," said Brock again. "You must go downstairs. I was about to notify the police."

She yielded to his insistence, and he closed the door behind them, while she put her head into her hands in a desperate moment of self-communion. She seemed on the edge of tears, but she conquered her emotion and straightened, for outside there was a sound of a motor engine, the voices of men, and as Brock led her to the landing, the negro servant Johnson and an officer in the dark green uniform of the State Police came up the stairs.

CHAPTER II

PRIVATE COALES was a florid young man, military in manner and fully impressed by the importance of his position. He gave Brock a quick glance.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm Joe Brock, from over at Mrs. Magruder's."

"What are you doing here?"

"I just came over to see Mr. Trudeau—"

The policeman looked at Johnson, who had been staring at Brock with such intentness that the yellowish whites of his eyes gave an impression of owlish wisdom.

"Do you know this man?" asked the policeman.

The colored man did not reply at once, and Coales repeated his question which seemed to startle the servant.

"Me? Oh, yes, boss. It's Mr. Brock. He—he's a friend of Mr. Trudeau."

"H-m. I see. And this lady?"

"Miss Judith? She's Mr. Trudeau's niece."

The young policeman looked from one to the other for the confirmation which they both gave.

"Well," he said with a businesslike air, "you'll all have to stay around here until the people from Northampton get here. Where's the body?"

With another glance at Brock, Johnson led the way and opened the door. The policeman entered while the girl remained in the passage. She had already recovered her self-possession, but her pallor and the pathos of her position had aroused all that was chivalrous in Brock. She had sunk upon a chair and looked very forlorn and friendless, so preoccupied with her trouble that she gave him no further notice. From the doorway the colored man still rolled his eyes toward Brock, whose actions seemed for some reason to have a strange fascination for him.

AT the request of the policeman Brock entered the library.

"You've been in here?"

"Yes. I came here to borrow a book. I rang the bell and called. Then I came up here and found the body. There's no telephone, but I was going for the police when you arrived."

"You didn't touch anything?"

"I pulled up the shade; that's all. And I found this on the stairway." Brock handed the policeman the red bandana handkerchief. Officer Coales turned the handkerchief over in his fingers, examining it carefully.

"Blood," he said. "I'll keep this for the coroner."

Then he glanced at the girl.

"Have you been in the room?"

"No, I haven't," she gasped.

"All right." Officer Coales closed the door and settled his Sam Browne belt. "We'll all have to wait here in the hall until the coroner comes. I phoned Northampton. He ought to be here in a few minutes."

Brock found himself wondering what the county officers would make of the case, which to his own mind, already skilled in this kind of investigation, seemed so clearly to involve his friend Trudeau. Flight was confession. And yet there were elements in the case in the old man's favor: the evidences of a struggle, the blow struck with a force almost unbelievable in one of Trudeau's age.

Miss Kennedy (Johnson had thus spoken of her) still sat with her head bowed as though completely overwhelmed by the situation in which she found herself. As she felt Brock's gaze upon her, she turned a glance up at him and tried to smile. He thought that her face was surely not classic in its contours. It had no really beautiful features, but like wild-flowers in a bouquet, they had an assembled charm.

TO all appearances the officials who came from Northampton completed in every particular the picture Brock's mind had already made of them. Dr. Burlingame, the coroner, was heavy of body, with a large round expanse of face in which, as though from motives of economy, his eyes, nose and mouth were set very close together. He had a thin voice which seemed to ooze through the compressions of successive inward layers of fat; and his shoes squeaked when he walked. His companion was a

small, silent man, quite thin, with deeply set eyes and a lantern jaw. His name was Julius Krouse, and he looked like a Pennsylvania German. He represented, as Brock afterward learned, the office of the District Attorney of the county. The coroner heard the report of the policeman, examining the bandana handkerchief that Brock had found, and then rolled into the library like a battleship, the thin

beyond was also in disorder—opened bureau drawers, a closet door ajar, various articles of apparel strewn on chairs and upon the floor. But the bed had not been slept in, for the spread was, in fact, without a wrinkle. While he watched the lumbering coroner peering here and there, Brock tried, as he had frequently done in his newspaper-work, to form a mental picture of the incidents leading to the killing and



*Brock leaped from his chair.
"Laudanum! That was it!"*

Krouse sliding unobtrusively in his wake. The space in the room was not large, and Dr. Burlingame seemed to fill it completely. He bent over the body, examined the wound in the head, touched with his fat fingers objects upon the table, his features still further contracting under the mental effort of the investigation. Mr. Krouse opened the window and examined the sill. Brock had followed into the room. Old habits of thought were aroused at once, the spirit of competition, the instinct of the chase, the old *flair* of the newspaper man confronted with a problem to be solved. The wound, it seemed, had been made with a blunt heavy implement, the position of the body indicating complete and sudden collapse. But there was nothing in the room that might have been used for the fatal blow. The bedroom

what had followed. Flight was indicated, flight hurried and terror-stricken.

"We'll get the story now, Mr. Krouse," said Burlingame in his thin puzzled voice.

"Johnson first, aint?" snapped Mr. Krouse in a lively tone.

They were the first words the thin man had uttered, but they affected Brock like the sharp bark of a terrier at the sudden scent of its quarry. Perhaps he had misjudged the capacities of Mr. Krouse by the meagerness of his physique.

The coroner's arm directed the way to the door. "We want your story, Johnson," he said when they reached the hallway.

"Yes, boss. I already done tol' it to dis yere policeman—"

"Well, we want to hear it all over again. How long have you worked for Mr. Trudeau?"

"About fo' years, sir."

"Always got along with him all right?"

"Yassir. Oh, yassir."

"What are your duties here?"

"Duties? Well, sir, I reckon you might say I done a little bit of ev'ything—cook, clean, make Mr. Trudeau's room, drive the Fo'd, and so fo'th."

"Mr. Trudeau was regular in his habits?"

"Yassir. Mos'ly. So that's what surprise me when Mr. Trudeau never come down to his breakfus when I calls him."

"I see. You called him at the regular hour."

"Yassir. Seven-thirty he likes be called. I cooked his breakfus and put it on the table same as usual. And den I—"

"Wait, now, Johnson!" Mr. Julius Krouse's accents broke sharply upon this desultory inquisition. The eyes of the negro rolled around sideways at the little man, startled at the peremptory tone.

"What kind of a job did you have before you came here a'ready?"

"I was a Pullman porter," Johnson replied.

Mr. Krouse drew his brows together so that his deeply sunken eyes were not even visible. "Why did you leave that job?" he asked sharply.

"Well, you might say, I was tired of traveling."

"That wasn't, now, the only reason, was it?"

A sullen shadow flitted across Johnson's face. "That's a good-enough reason."

"Not good enough for me. Of course if we make up our minds, we can find out all about it maybe. You'll save us some time if you tell the truth. You weren't fired, were you?"

The colored man frowned and then decided to smile.

"Well, sir, I don't see how it can make any difference. But I'll tell you the truth. I had an argument with a conductor, and he framed me. I had to get out."

Krouse grinned at Johnson's discomfiture.

"That's all what I wanted to know, Doctor. Go ahead with your questions."

BROCK was now quite sure that he had misjudged the little man. He spoke with the homely locutions of the neighborhood, but what there was of Mr. Krouse was intelligent from head to foot. The negro was worried, and his manner be-

trayed an uneasiness as Burlingame spoke again: "Tell us, Johnson, all you know that would throw light on this case. At what time did you go upstairs?"

"Just wait a minute," Krouse broke in again. "Did you notice anything funny about Trudeau this week or so past?"

The ex-porter rubbed his head reflectively. "Nossir, not special. Mr. Trudeau was a quiet sort of a man. Maybe he just stretched hisself more often than usual."

"Stretched himself! What do you mean?"

"Jes' stretch his arms this-a-way."

"Oh, like he was tired?"

"Yassir."

"People around here say he's queer. Did you ever find him queer?"

"He wasn't queer to me. We got along all right. Dese yere Pennsylvania Dutch people around here never had much use fo' him 'cause he never had much use fo' them. I reckon Miss Judith can tell you he wasn't queer to her."

"I'll leave Miss Kennedy say something in a little while. Did you know of anybody who had a grudge against Trudeau?"

"Nossir, nobody. But he didn't have more'n one or two close friends. Mr. Brock was acquainted with him about as well as anybody."

"And Mr. Brock came here once in a while?"

"Once or twice a week."

Krouse turned to Brock suddenly. "You weren't here last night?" he asked him.

"No sir. I went out hunting in the afternoon," Brock replied, "and was so tired that I turned in at supper-time with all my clothes on. Mrs. Magruder, my aunt, will testify to that."

While Brock was speaking, he was aware of the eyes of the colored man again queerly staring at him. If Krouse noticed, he gave no sign. But Brock was becoming impatient of this constant scrutiny.

"You say you didn't notice anything funny about Trudeau," Krouse went on slowly. "Did he, now, give you any ideas that he might have apprehensions?"

"Have what?" asked Johnson.

"Did he show some nervousness yesterday? Did he seem frightened?"

"Nossir. Not nervous."

"You're sure?"

"He never spoke much to me. Jes' 'good mornin', Tom'—like that."

"And you had no reasons to think any stranger was coming here?"

"Nossir."

"Ever see the dead man?"

"Nossir, never."

Burlingame had lighted a cigar, accepting, with approval, Mr. Krouse's part in the investigation. The little man went on: "Anybody besides Mr. Brock been here the last few days?"

"Yassir. Lemme see. Doctor Wylie about Mr. Trudeau's rheumatism, an' Squire McDermott about gettin' a clutch of Plymouth Rock eggs—an' young Mr. Archie McDermott to ask when Miss Judith was expected home—an' Mr. Mallory from the feed-store about buying this year's hay from the lower meadow. Young Mr. Mallory shooting in the meadow, too. Oh, yassir—and Mr. Daumier, Squire McDermott's brother-in-law from New York."

"And what was it he wanted?"

"I don't know, sir. He's a friend of Mr. Trudeau's."

"And those are all the people who came visiting at the house a'ready?"

"Yassir."

Brock kept his eye closely on the colored man. His replies were cool enough, but a number of tiny beads of perspiration had appeared close to the edge of his kinky hair unexplained by the coolness of the house.

"All right, Johnson. Tell us what happened, now, last night a'ready."

"Last night? Well, sir, nothin' happened last night, so far as I know. I went to bed—"

"Not so fast, yet. Did you cook Mr. Trudeau's supper?"

"Oh, yassir."

"Was he excited a little?"

"I never noticed. But he didn't eat much."

"Oh, he didn't eat much. And where did he go after supper?"

"Upstairs to his library—or den, as I calls it."

"Did you see him again last night once?"

"Oh, nossir. I washed up, smoked a cigar an' went to bed."

"What time did you go to bed?"

"Around nine. I'd been choppin' wood in the afternoon, an' I was tired."

"Where is your room?"

"Upstairs in de attic."

"On this side of the house?"

"Nossir. Over Miss Judith's room—yonder."

Mr. Krouse opened his coat, put his fin-

gers in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and swayed back and forth for a moment, his little eyes snapping mischievously.

"You didn't hear anything during the night, Johnson?"

"Nossir. Nothing."

"When were you in the library yesterday a'ready?"

"Yestiddy mohnin' cleaning up."

"And making the bed in the bedroom?"

"Yassir, and putting things to rights."

"You've got more than one pair of shoes, Johnson?"

THE apparent irrelevance of the question was rather startling. At least, Johnson seemed to think so, for he blinked once or twice and rolled his eyes down toward his shabby brown laced shoes.

"Why, yessir, I 'spec' I has."

"A pair of button shoes—black button shoes?"

Johnson rolled his eyes up at his interlocutor while his gaze wavered.

"Yassir, I got buttoned shoes. But I don't see—"

Johnson paused. Brock chuckled. He did not comprehend the meaning of the questions, but he was now sure that he had been mistaken in his early estimate of this astonishing Mr. Krouse.

"You sleep pretty good, don't you, Johnson?" the inquisitor asked again.

"Y-yassir. I always did res' good."

"Never walk, now, in your sleep?"

"The which?"

"Walk! Get up in the night and come downstairs."

"No *suh*! Not me. When I go to sleep, I stays asleep."

"H-m! And you didn't hear anything in the night? No sounds of voices angry? No sounds of a fight? No fall of a heavy body on the floor?"

"No *suh*. I aint heard nothin'."

Mr. Krouse took a pace or two up and down the passage.

"All right, Johnson. Now, maybe, you can tell us what happened this morning."

The colored man had been visibly disturbed by this close catechism. He rolled his eyes at Brock no more, now too intent, apparently upon his alibi. As he did not at once reply, Krouse questioned again.

"Did you knock on Mr. Trudeau's door this morning a'ready?"

"Nossir. I never knocks. I jes' calls. Mr. Trudeau is always up early, but he never comes down until about eight."

"And you prepared the breakfast same as always?"

"Yassir. Eggs, bacon, coffee an' toast, an' sot 'em on de table."

"And he didn't come down. What did you do then?"

"I went in de hall and called him. But he didn't answer, or make any sound. I knocked on his do—an' called again. But he didn't answer, so I opened de do' into de den—an' saw—what you all see now—"

"What did you do then once?"

"Twa'nt no place fo' me. I ran downstairs an' outside, jumped in de Fo'd and went to the police station in Laurel an' tol' Mr. Coales what I'd seen. Mr. Coales, he telephoned to Northampton and come here with me. An' dat's all, boss."

Mr. Krouse seemed already weary of the narrative, and when the colored man finished, he waved him aside.

"All right. That will be all, Johnson. But don't go away from here without telling where you're going. Understand?"

JOHNSON swallowed uneasily and turned away but he did not go far—only a few paces away, where he stood uncertainly, looking queerly at Brock. Mr. Krouse turned toward him sharply. "For why are you waiting around here?"

"Didn't you tol' me not to go away?"

"I said not to leave the house."

"Oh." But Johnson still lingered, and Krouse turned on him.

"You go downstairs now. Get out!" The colored man obeyed him.

Mr. Krouse's examination had its comical aspects, but it was so thorough as to remove the comedy of his curious locutions. The examination of Miss Judith Kennedy was quite perfunctory—merely some questions as to her relations with Trudeau, the reasons for her return to Castle Rock which coincided so curiously with the tragedy. She answered quietly, hesitant and perturbed at moments, but creating an excellent impression of affection for Trudeau and bewilderment at the suspicions caused by his sudden flight from the scene of death. Mr. Krouse, possibly in deference to her sex and her unhappiness, did not question her too closely, thus showing a consideration that still further increased Brock's good opinion. And as Miss Kennedy expressed a desire to go to the house of a friend in Laurel, until she could gather her thoughts

together, he permitted her to depart in the car of the coroner, who was in some haste to gather a jury to pass upon the crime.

As the others went down the stairs, Krouse turned to Brock.

"Well, Mr. Brock, you tell me something, maybe. I let Johnson go, because I wanted to talk to you by myself. They say you know Trudeau pretty well. How well, now, do you know him?"

"A neighborly acquaintance, Mr. Krouse. I've been coming over once in a while to talk with him about books. I'm a literary man."

"So, you're a writer feller?"

Brock nodded. "Mystery stories."

"This is right in your line of business, then. Ever notice anything mysterious like about Trudeau?"

"Mysterious? Well—sometimes I thought he was a little nervous."

"Especial recent maybe?"

"It may have been only a whim of mine. It's my business to be imaginative."

"I see. And what did you imagine?"

"Oh, I just thought he acted queerly."

"How did he act that was queer?"

"Well, when we were sitting here at night, he'd get up in the middle of a conversation, then stand by the window and listen."

"Did he ever, now, give you reasons for doing that?"

"He said that he'd been losing some of his chickens and wanted to find out what was taking them."

"Did you hear any sounds ever when he listened at the window?"

"Maybe an owl hooting."

"Did he have any other funny habits?"

"Well—there's a little blue piece of bronze on his desk. You can see it in there. It represents Satan rising triumphant from two prostrate bodies. When we weren't talking, his gaze kept turning to it. It was a kind of fetish, I think. I once asked him where he had found the thing, but he evaded me."

"A fetish! What for kind of a fetish?"

"A fetish? You might call it a charm or an idol."

"Ah, idols! I understand. H-m! Did he have any other funny habits?"

"Not that I noticed—just mannerisms."

"What mannerisms?"

"He always had a way of throwing his arms suddenly at full length above his head, and then as suddenly dropping them—what Johnson called stretching himself."

"Nervousness?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"Anything else yet?"

"Nothing except that he'd seldom go off the place—only out of the house to feed the chickens and gather eggs. I often asked him why he didn't visit his neighbors, and he said he was a 'prisoner of hope,' whatever that means."

Mr. Krouse frowned and swayed back and forth.

a finding against Trudeau in this crime. But I've got some doubts, maybe."

"I'm glad you have. I've had a good deal of experience in dealing with murder cases. The obvious inference is usually the wrong one. Have you thought that Mr. Trudeau might be dead also?"

"Yah. Already I thought of that, Mr. Brock. A little later maybe we know some more about Trudeau. I'm here to get some evidence together for the district at-



Krouse fitted two slips of paper together. "The rest of this must be somewhere," Mr. Brock.

"Did it seem to you—this listening at windows might mean he was scared of somebody or something?"

"It might."

"When were you here last?" Krouse asked.

"On Thursday, four—five days ago."

"Was he nervous then?"

"Preoccupied, I'd say—staring at his little blue statue of Beelzebub. He didn't want to talk. So I just borrowed a book and took it away."

"What did you want to see him for specially this morning a'ready?"

"About getting some information. I wanted to find out the effect of certain drugs on the human system to fit a problem in a new tale that I'm working on. Mr. Trudeau is a great reader and knows a lot. I was hoping he could help me."

Mr. Krouse turned aside toward the door into the den.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Brock. I want to go over this case still, before the coroner gets back. The jury is likely to make

torney. We'll see. You come with me, Mr. Brock, and look around a little."

CHAPTER III

KROUSE went to the body, carefully turning out the pockets. He showed disappointment that they contained no letters or anything that might suggest a clue to the identity of the man or his purposes in the house. There were some notes of expenditures written in a fine script in French, which Brock translated, but of no importance; some American bank-notes and a railroad ticket to New York in a pocket-book; in the trouser pocket some coins and a small brass case containing a tiny leaden image of St. Rita; some cigarette papers and a tin of American tobacco.

"If he'd had no ideas of being killed," Krouse muttered, "maybe he wouldn't have hidden his identity better."

Brock smiled at the strange convolutions of the sentence, but Krouse had turned to the wound in the head.

"Something blunt—more blunt at the lower edge than the upper, maybe the butt end of a revolver. . . . The blow was struck from the front and on the right, showing a fair fight. The skull is crushed also. That blow was struck by a strong arm."

"More powerful than Trudeau's?" Brock asked significantly. "He is seventy years old and suffers from rheumatism."

"Desperation makes a man sometimes stronger than ten. Just the same—"

On closer examination of the hands, one finger-nail was found to be torn, a further indication of a struggle. On the table was a smear of blood and a finger-print noted immediately by them both. But it was Brock who suddenly exclaimed:

"The blue Beelzebub! It's missing."

"Missing! The devil! You're sure it was there a'ready?"

"Yes, sure. Right by the inkwell. Look—you can see the rim of dust around the place it was taken from. It couldn't have walked away itself. He must have taken it with him."

"There was no tricks in it? No hidden places to put valuables?"

"I don't know. The old man was so sensitive about the thing that I didn't dare examine it. It just looked like a very good piece by some modern Frenchman."

"Well, I don't know nothing about statues," Krouse growled.

He had taken off his hat, and was scratching his head.

"There's seldom a crime like this without a clear-cut motive, Mr. Krouse," Brock suggested.

"Maybe now, don't I know that, Mr. Brock?" the investigator replied peevishly. He sat down at the desk-table and was going carefully through the drawer, which was unlocked and the key missing. Here was the notebook in which Trudeau kept his chicken-yard accounts—all carefully recorded in a small, almost feminine script. There was a book of stamps, a few letters from Miss Kennedy which Krouse took the liberty of reading—mere records of her life at college and containing names and places which seemed to have no bearing upon the mystery. At least he told Mr. Brock this, putting the letters carefully into his breast pocket for further reference. Krouse examined carefully several

slips of paper, one especially which he touched with a finger moistened at his lips.

"This here is funny," Krouse was muttering. "There's a waste basket maybe? Let's see it, Mr. Brock."

THERE were other small pieces of paper, two of which Mr. Krouse extracted and laid upon the desk beside the piece found in the drawer. Brock leaned over his shoulder excitedly. On four of the slips of paper were pencil-marks, hurriedly scrawled; when two of them were fitted together, the numerals "5000" could be plainly deciphered.

"Money-straps from a bank!"

Krouse nodded, as he fitted two other slips of paper together. One of them showed two penciled ciphers, but the other figures had been torn off.

"The rest of this must be somewhere, Mr. Brock. Look in the fireplace a minute."

Brock went down on his hands and knees and searched among the ashes, which revealed nothing. "The nights are chilly still. He's had a fire here."

"All right. I've got some ideas. There's been a large sum of money in this drawer—inside of a few days, before that fire was lighted. Trudeau's money. I think we can trace that. By the folds in the papers that fit together, it looks like that five thousand was in hundred-dollar bills. These here other slips of paper show that there must have been several packages. Ten, fifteen, twenty thousand maybe also." Krouse settled back in the old Frenchman's armchair and gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"I think we've found the motive you were speaking about, Mr. Brock," he growled.

Brock smiled. "You can't be convinced then, that Trudeau was responsible for this man's death."

"It's too early yet, not to be convinced one way or another," Krouse replied dryly. "If this dead man knew Trudeau had all this money in the house and came upon the old man to rob him, Trudeau might have fought and killed the man when he was attacked. But the dead man hasn't any mark of the high-class crook, or yet of a second-story man neither. He looks like a workman dressed up for Sunday. His hands also show signs of hard work sometime. And if he was a city crook, he'd

have waited until everything was quiet and come in at the window by the trellis and rainspout. There's no signs. Now, take the blackmail theory. Things look like that. Why should Trudeau bring this here money in the drawer of that desk, unless he drew it from the bank for some reason? He has no need for all this money here. Ten dollars or so would be all that he wanted in cash."

"But if he had drawn this money to pay blackmail," put in Brock quietly, "he'd have paid it out, wouldn't he—instead of fighting the dead man for its possession?"

"I see a'ready you follow me," said Krouse as he got up from the desk. "There's a reasonable doubt, Mr. Brock. The coroner, now, has made up his mind a'ready what his jury's verdict ought to be. Well, I've got different ideas. The old man's gone. Things certainly *look* bad for him, but I've got to be shown once."

HE got up from the chair and went down upon his hands, crawling around the room, his face close to the floor. Brock stood for a moment in thought, aware that his own instinct as to Trudeau's innocence had not been amiss. He looked around at the familiar bookshelves as though hoping that these friends of Trudeau and himself could find words to speak; the sets of Hugo, Flaubert, Zola with their familiar bindings, the collection of odd volumes of Anatole France, from which "Penguin Island," the volume that he had borrowed last week, was missing, for there was the space from which, with Trudeau's permission, Brock had taken it. He had intended bringing it back the first time he called again.

In turning, to watch the eager little man upon the floor, he shifted his balance slightly and his hand caught the top of the bookshelves, about shoulder high. His fingers touched a book that lay there—a book that seemed familiar. Brock stared in amazement, turning rapidly to bewilderment that brought forth a slight exclamation. He glanced toward Krouse, but the officer of the law was too intent upon his search for unconsidered trifles to hear him. Brock took the book down and opened it. It was the copy of "Penguin Island" that he had borrowed last Thursday. To make sure that this was not a duplicate copy, he read the familiar annotation that he had noticed when he first opened its pages: "*E. Trudeau, October, 1924.*" The upper corner

of the title page was torn too, as in the book that Brock had borrowed. This was the book that he had borrowed; there was no doubt of it—the very book. And yet he knew he had seen it lying on his own work-table yesterday afternoon before he went out for his walk. The thing was most extraordinary—more than that, weird, unbelievable. This book, torn title-page and all, had duplicated itself!

Puzzled and disturbed by this strange discovery, he tried to think of some logical way in which the transfer of the book could have been made—and without success. Perhaps he had been mistaken when he thought that he had seen "Penguin Island" on his work-table yesterday. He had learned recently that his memory could play the most extraordinary tricks. But this trick hardly seemed to have the dignity of the mystery with which it was surrounded. Who would have returned the book? Surely not Aunt Julia, who had never been inside the Trudeau house, nor Trudeau, who never went off the place. Johnson? Why should he have done it?

He seemed to have been thinking for a long time when he heard Mr. Krouse give a quick grunt of satisfaction. The little man was sitting on the floor at the corner of the bookshelves near where the body had lain, peering into the shadows at the corner.

"You've found something?" Brock asked.

"Yah." Krouse made no motion to rise, and only began fumbling in his trouser pocket, in a pleased sort of a way. "Old Trudeau made any habits of shooting at rats?" he asked.

"Are you crazy?"

"Not ex-act-ly!" said Krouse, grinning again. "But there's a bullet-hole down here in the molding, beside the bookcase."

"A bullet-hole!"

"Yes, a new bullet-hole with white splinterings around the edges also. And where there's bullet-holes, there's maybe bullets." He had taken a huge clasp-knife from his pocket and began cutting into the woodwork. "Bullets are useful things in this kind of business," he grunted as he worked. "Where there's a—bullet there must have been—a gun. It isn't far in, very. Ah, here it is—a thirty-two, it might be," he said slowly. "Do you know anything about pistols, Mr. Brock?"

"A little."

"Well, tell me what you think of it once." Krouse handed it to Brock, who

turned the thing over in his fingers. "H-m, there's something unusual about it."

"So you saw also—the nickel tip. That's a foreign idea, Brock."

"German."

"You think so, or French. We'll find out about that, maybe."

KROUSE relaxed in his sitting posture like a tired child. But Brock saw that he wasn't tired in the least, for his smile had grown into a grin, and he chuckled audibly. He saw Brock's look of inquiry.

"For why you wonder I laugh? Well, it's just I was thinking how much noise, now, a pistol makes when it is shot off in the middle of the night. And Johnson not to hear it! Maybe he don't sleep like hell when he gets going good! Aint?"

Brock agreed that Johnson was a fine sleeper.

Krouse put his knife into his pocket and resumed his crawling around the room. Brock watched him curiously. No detail of floor or rug was too small to escape notice. At last, his task apparently completed, he stood up, grinning like a gargoyle.

"Well, we're getting warmer, Mr. Brock," he said with a laugh that transformed the longitudinal furrows of his long face into concentric rings, and disclosed a gold tooth that gleamed pleasantly. "We're getting a lot warmer. Maybe nearer the facts without being able to settle on any-body yet at all."

"You mean—that Trudeau did not do the killing?"

"There you go so fast again. I'm not saying that. He might of done it, but there were others that might of done it too."

"Others!" Brock gasped.

Krouse nodded with a wolfish smile. Then he went to the body, turned it over on its back and carefully scrutinized its collar. Then he straightened and spoke with an oracular air:

"There was one other man in this room last night, beside Trudeau and that fellow there, Mr. Brock—maybe two others."

The man's assurance was surprising.

"How do you deduce that?"

Krouse exhibited two small objects in the palm of his hand. One was a paper match, the other a safety-pin.

"Trudeau didn't, now, smoke much, or there would be an ash-receiver somewhere."

"I always knocked my pipe against the fender," Brock admitted.

"A box of safety-matches would last him a long while maybe—as he never went to the village he wouldn't use these paper matches they hand out at cigar-stores."

"No. But I do," Brock said, taking a clip of them from his coat pocket. "That paper match might be one of mine."

"But Johnson cleaned up here yesterday. Let's see your paper matches."

Krouse took the burnt bit of paper and compared it with the matches in Brock's paper packet.

"They're just like. Where did you get these matches?"

"They give them to you at Snyder's cigar-store in Laurel."

"Do you, now, smoke cigarettes?" Krouse asked.

"Not when I can help it. I'm a pipe-smoker."

The little man examined Brock's face soberly. Then he broke into another of his ghoulish smiles.

"That's all right, Mr. Brock. I'm not accusing you of the murder yet. You shouldn't be worried a'ready. This paper match," he said, holding it up, "was used to light a cigarette—a manufactured cigarette."

"Ashes?"

"Two traces of them. Dr. Burlingame walked on a third trace, maybe, when he went first into the bedroom. Look close—there by the end wall under that there chair. See them? Almost dust. The dead man rolled his own. And that kind leaves bits of burned tobacco instead of dust."

"Where's the cigarette-end?"

"Where I thought it was. Outside on the drive under the window. Come, I show you; I saw it a'ready."

From the window Brock followed the direction of Krouse's long index finger. There *was* a cigarette-end lying in the road.

THIS small-town investigator was giving the ex-reporter a lesson in cool analysis and deduction that might have been profitable to some of the third-degree men of the New York Police Department. For a moment he had thought of telling Mr. Krouse of the extraordinary duplication of the volume of "Penguin Island," but he decided for the present that the matter was irrelevant—especially as Mr. Krouse was standing before him holding a small

object carefully between thumb and fore-finger for Brock's inspection.

"There's all kinds of safety-pins, Mr. Brock. Little and big ones. Common brass or black enamel ones, which might tell nothing. This safety-pin is, now, gold—I think solid also. There's several kinds of gold safety-pins. Some of them mothers buy for babies; others are used by ladies in fastening their wraps. But this here



*"Bullets are useful things
in this kind of business,"
he grunted.*

pin gives me a better picture of the third man in this room last night than anything else that has been found yet. Such pins like these are used by the swell dressers to pin their soft collars back of their ties.

This fella I'm thinking of is something of a sport and in need of money also. He had something to do with the death of this man. The hasp is bent so I won't put him apast some part in the fighting in this here room. The pin was torn from his collar and fell into the fringe of the

rug. I don't say the owner of this pin was the murderer, but I'll bet a pound of scrapple that he wanted to know what was going to be done with Trudeau's money a'ready."

"Sounds reasonable," said Brock. "But I'm still puzzled. Something you said awhile ago indicated that you thought there might have been a fourth man in this room last night."

Krouse frowned. "Ah, Mr. Brock, but that's, now, something I keep to myself," he said dryly.

"I guess we don't find nothing more here now. It looks like Trudeau went away in too much of a hurry to be dead. He wanted people to think maybe somebody else mussed up the room. But he was too particular how careful he mussed it—no bureau drawers emptied out, or things under the bed. If he's dead now, I've got to do some better guessing. It was Trudeau fixed this room like it is. I'll risk some bets on that. And he didn't leave no secrets behind him except the letters of the young lady which don't tell much, and what the dead man could tell and he don't tell nothing. But I'm ready when the jury comes. The dead man was killed by a person or persons unknown. That will be the verdict, I guess, Mr. Brock."

"That's right. If there was another man—"

"There was, Mr. Brock—two other men."

Krouse led the way to the door. "I don't have this investigating to do much ever," he confided. "Just bootleggers and moonshiners once in a while." He turned to Brock with a grin. "For ten years a'ready I've been wanting somebody to get murdered in Northampton County, so I could find out who killed him."

CHAPTER IV

WITH the arrival of the coroner's jury to view the body, Brock was permitted to leave the house, with the understanding that he was to appear the following morning to be questioned.

The first thing Brock did when he reached his Aunt Julia's was to go directly to his room, to find out whether the copy of "Penguin Island" that he had borrowed from Trudeau was on his table where he had supposed it was.

More than slightly astonished by the morning's experience, he did not know whether to be gratified or disappointed to find that the copy of "Penguin Island" was not on his table. He was certain now, as far as any mind weary with overwork can be certain, that he had finished reading the book, that it had been on his table yesterday and that he had not returned it to Trudeau. Who, then, had taken the book back to Trudeau's library? Mrs. Magruder had gone to the village to do her morning's marketing, and so he awaited her return, the puzzle of the book still bothering him. He realized that he was in a condition of mind when trifles are magnified, and he knew of course that it didn't matter to anybody one way or another whether "Penguin Island" was at Trudeau's house or Mrs. Magruder's. But the thought of it hung in the back of his mind and would not be driven out.

But he was sure of one thing—he thought no more about his own mystery story, which, for the first time in weeks, had gone out of his mind as completely as though he had never begun it. For here at his very door was a mystery based on the realities that were so conspicuously lacking in his own creation. Krouse was no figure of romance, as the detective in his new book had turned out to be, but the most commonplace of individuals with a curious talent for negligible facts. His evidence, frail as it was, would create the necessary doubt in the minds of the coroner's jury and thus perhaps slightly alleviate the concern of Miss Kennedy.

Brock was no squire of dames. At least, he hadn't been since he had come back from overseas and found the girl he had been engaged to married to the other fellow. He was, you might say, no longer interested in women except as the bauble of an idle hour much better given to golf or a volume of essays by the fireside. The feeling inspired by Miss Judith Kennedy's position in her home town came from Brock's desire to be helpful to one in distress. He therefore decided to visit the Hawleys' house, where she had temporarily taken refuge, and offer her what cheer he could. As one of Trudeau's friends, he thought it reasonable that she should accept this kindly attention.

Mrs. Magruder, flustered by the news of the crime as she had heard it garbled in the stores of the village, found her nephew waiting for her in the parlor. The

talk in Laurel was to the effect that Trudeau would be found guilty by the coroner's jury, that the police were on his track and that he would probably be arrested before the day had passed.

"I always said there was something queer about that man. Anyone who can live next door to you for five years without passing the time of day, ought to be looked on with suspicion. I've always thought he'd come to a bad end, and I couldn't understand, Joe, how you could be so intimate with him. That poor girl, Judith Kennedy, coming home to a house like that!"

"Do you know her, Aunt Julia?" he asked.

"Yes. We used to meet in summer in the village and walk home together sometimes. Such a nice girl, and clever. I'm so sorry for her. I'd invite her here to stay until after things are settled if I thought she'd come."

"She's gone to the Hawleys'."

"Oh, has she? Well, she and Jessie Hawley used to go to school together." Mrs. Magruder put her packages on the table and sat flushing with excitement and interest while he told her briefly his own part in the happenings at Castle Rock and gave her a summary of the activities of Mr. Julius Krouse.

A casual question about the volume of "Penguin Island" elicited from Aunt Julia the information that if she had noticed the book, she knew no more than her nephew did about its disappearance from the house.

"Are you sure you didn't carry it over when you went out gunning yesterday afternoon?"

"Of course I'm sure. I went off in the opposite direction, over toward Laurel woods."

"Well, why bother? It hasn't anything to do with the murder, and who cares now whether you returned it or not!"

IN the afternoon on his way to the village

Brock went to the Hawley place, and told Jessie Hawley, who came to the door, that he had some information that Miss Kennedy might like to have. She came down at once, apologizing for her appearance, though he saw nothing to apologize for. Her eyes were red as though she had been crying, but she listened to him gravely while he told her what had happened at Castle Rock after her departure, and of his own belief that while Mr. Trudeau

could not be exonerated until he returned and proved his innocence, the coroner's jury would probably find on the evidence presented that the slain man had come to his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown. She thanked him for his kindness, and he resolved again to help her through this difficulty for Trudeau's sake and for her own.

"It's all so terrible, Mr. Brock," she said helplessly. "I can't—I won't believe that Uncle Emile. . . . He was always excitable, emotional, nervous—and recently even apprehensive of I don't know what, but he was very kind. And to kill a man! No, that's impossible!"

She raised her chin, and her eyes flashed their confidence in her assertion.

"Of course you're right," he said gently. "Emile Trudeau is not of the stuff that murderers are made of. And yet," he added thoughtfully, "if he had been attacked—"

She caught at the phrase eagerly. "Yes, if he had been attacked, he would have been justified in defending himself."

"Of course. That may be proven. Perhaps he will come back and prove it."

He paused as he approached the question suggested by his own observation and her previous remarks.

"You said your uncle was apprehensive. Had you noticed that when you were home last—or earlier, even? Have you any reason to believe that he feared anyone?"

"Yes, I—" She stopped as though she feared that her reply might be incriminating.

He said nothing for a moment, and then, as he found her blue eyes regarding him soberly, he smiled.

"I want to help you if I can, before you are questioned by the police again. Your uncle has been very friendly to me. I would like to help him too. Perhaps you'd better tell me if you think he seemed to be in any sort of danger—if he had had any warning of the visit of this stranger."

"I don't know." She hesitated a moment longer and then searched her visitor's face eagerly as though for signs of any dissimulation. He returned her gaze steadily, unable to repress a smile of friendliness and utter sympathy. This, it seemed, disarmed her.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Brock, for I think you can be trusted. When I came home during the Easter holidays, I thought Uncle Emile seemed to be acting strangely. We

had always been so happy together. And while he would never leave the place, except to go to the bank, and constantly refused to meet strangers, he seemed very contented with his books, his chickens and his vegetable-garden. But at Easter he seemed to be moody and unsettled, nervous at times and very quiet at others. I thought I had always understood him, but there were things about him then, that I did not understand. He watched the mail with an eagerness that was very different from his composure during my aunt's lifetime. Then he seemed to have no cares and asked nothing of the world but to be left alone. And then ten days ago I had a letter from him, a curious letter. It puzzled me. It hinted at sickness, loneliness and the uncertainty of life at his age. It was not like him, because he isn't a hypochondriac."

"You thought this letter showed an unusual condition of mind?" Brock asked.

"Yes, it did. I wrote him a long letter. For several days there was no response. And then suddenly I had another letter—" She paused.

"A letter showing definite apprehension?"

"Yes, definite—the letter showed fear of something immediate and terrible."

"I see. Then your return just at this time was not accidental."

"No. That's why I took the night train. I was afraid—the terrible something that he feared might happen before I could get here. And it did." She bent her head for a moment and then spoke again, her voice trembling: "I'm not sure that I could have been of any use, or prevented what—what—happened; but I—I might have been able to give him some comfort—if he had told me the whole truth—even have been able to help him in some way."

BROCK wanted to reassure her, but realized that there was nothing that he could say that would give her more courage than she already possessed.

"I don't have to tell you how sorry I am," he said slowly after a moment. "Assuming that your uncle is alive, which I take to be the case, you are placed in a difficult position. Of course your return to your uncle's house, just after the body had been found, had suggested to my mind the thought that you had been sent for. The coincidence is too startling not to have been noticed by Mr. Krouse. His ex-

amination of you this morning was too perfunctory to be above suspicion. I'm afraid that at the inquest the questions will be more searching. Your letters to your uncle were found in his desk by Mr. Krouse. I don't know what is in them, but Krouse may have been able to read your anxiety between the lines. I'm afraid so. Therefore, I think, unless you have some reason for concealment, that you ought to be quite frank before the coroner's jury."

She glanced out of the window and then around the room uncertainly.

"I want to do what would help Uncle Emile the most," she said at last. "Oh, don't you understand that something I might say, if I was frank, some admission of my anxiety, might place him in a still worse position? I don't know what to do. If I thought that any word of mine—"

"I understand your feelings, Miss Kennedy," Brock said gently, "but you've told me that you know nothing of the danger that threatened your uncle. Nothing that you testified to could be as damaging as your uncle's flight. In fact, any testimony as to a threatened danger might be construed as a point in his favor. I mean, of course, self-defense."

"Yes, I've thought of that," she replied quietly. "But then, if he was attacked and killed the man in defending himself, why did he run away? Why didn't he stay here, give himself up to the police and tell the whole story?" she asked miserably.

"There's an answer to that, of course. There are some facts that he did not dare to reveal."

"What do you mean, Mr. Brock?"

"I can't explain except to tell you my own impressions of your uncle's habits and his mental attitude. His way of speaking figuratively about life, for instance. Why did he call himself a prisoner of hope?"

"Yes," she said. "I've heard him use that phrase. He used it in one of his letters."

"It seemed to me to suggest a reference to the past of which I knew nothing. What was the significance of the little blue bronze on his library table? That too was figurative—Satan rising, escaping from—or is it triumphant over?—two prostrate souls. You must have noticed—"

"Yes. I hated the thing. It is horrible. It always seemed to exercise a singular fascination for him."



He had made up his mind not to discuss the crime publicly, but he found himself immediately the center of interest.

"Did you know that the statuette has vanished?"

She stared at him, startled.

"How very strange!" she gasped.

"Do you know anything about the thing?" he asked. "I mean—how it came into his possession, or why he seemed to treasure it so highly?"

She did not reply at once, and when she did, her voice had no life in it. She turned her head away from him and stared fixedly at the figures in the carpet. "No—I—I know nothing about it," she said at last.

He thought that she seemed suddenly to grow very tired and got up at once to go. This aroused her to a sense of her obligations, for she rose and took his proffered hand impulsively.

"Oh, please, don't think I'm ungrateful. You've been very kind, Mr. Brock. I do thank you. You're trying to help me, but I must find my way alone, I'm afraid. I'll have to be guided by my instincts to do what's best for my uncle. It's very dreadful to me to think of him, an old man, not in the best of health, a fugitive from justice, and terrified at this nameless something that still pursues him."

"Perhaps he will write you."

"I pray that he will. I would go to him wherever he is."

There was fire in her devotion to the old man, confirming Brock's own opinion

of the unfortunate Emile Trudeau; for no one who brought forth such affection could be as guilty as his flight had shown him to be.

Leaving the Hawleys' house, Brock went on slowly to the village to attend to a commission for his aunt. He had made up his mind not to discuss the crime publicly, and had indeed been cautioned by Julius Krouse not to do so; but slight as his acquaintance was with the people of the village, he found himself immediately the center of interest at the drug-store under the corner of the Laurel Mountain House which was a sort of meeting-place both winter and summer for the people of the village. The proprietor of the store, Mr. Ritter, with a sense of reflected glory in waiting upon an important witness in the only murder mystery Laurel had ever known, insisted on asking him questions about his experiences in a loud tone of voice which attracted the attention of his other visitors. Brock answered quietly, giving only the obvious facts as the whole village already knew them. He wanted to be waited on so that he could escape the gathering crowd, but Mr. Ritter showed an irritating desire to prolong the visit, and while he talked, waited on his other customers first. Dr. Wylie came in. He had been Trudeau's physician, and Brock

had called on him once or twice, at Mrs. Magruder's suggestion, at moments when he had needed some quieting influence for his agitated nerves. Brock liked Dr. Wylie. He knew something about nerves. He had had a breakdown himself once, before he had moved from Philadelphia to Laurel. He was a wholesome individual, a friend of Mrs. Magruder's, with the best heart in the world, whose only faults were his loquacity and his desire to dominate a situation. Here was an opportunity not to be missed. So he put his arm around Brock's shoulders and insisted on introducing him to all the other people in the store. Brock did not wish to hurt Dr. Wylie's feelings by wriggling free and escaping to the street, a course that he might have been justified in taking under the circumstances, so he endured the publicity in silence.

"This is Mr. Joseph Brock, gentlemen, the famous author of 'A Leap in the Dark,' a patient of mine—oh, nothing serious, just too much nerves from overwork. Joe, you ought to know these people: Dave Mallory keeps the flour and feed store; Bill Slosson farms out your way; Henry Hawley runs the coal-yard and ice plant; George Reifsnnyder's assistant manager of the Laurel Mountain House—and here's Squire McDermott, just coming in. Good evening, Squire. I guess you've met Joe Brock—comes from the big city you left to come to God's country."

"How are you, Mr. Brock?" said McDermott. He was short and stout, with a suggestion of the city about his manner and dress. He had tawny gray hair and a face empurpled by good living and the weather—one of the rich men of the community, Brock understood, a former alderman in the old days in New York, now a chicken-breeder and gentleman farmer, with an interest in the Laurel Mountain House. He had a large fat hand and flapped it into Brock's in a perfunctory manner.

"I hear you were one of the people who found the body up at Castle Rock," he went on. "Very terrible case. The only murder in Northampton County in twenty years, they say. Emile Trudeau's gone too. Looks bad for him. I liked Trudeau. What he didn't know about Barred Rocks wasn't worth knowing. But murder! Well, we can't stand for that around here, can we, Wylie?"

"I can't believe Trudeau did it," Dr.

Wylie said stanchly. "He wouldn't have had the strength."

"Well," growled the ex-alderman, "why the hell didn't he stay here and face the thing out? I reckon people would have tried to help him see it through. There wasn't anything—" he made a significant circular motion with his forefinger at his temple—"wrong with him up here? My boy Archie said he seemed pretty queer when he was up last week asking about Judith. What do you think, Mr. Brock? You were a friend of his."

"I never thought he was queer in the least," Brock said, "certainly not in the way you mean, Mr. McDermott. And when a man's seventy, he's got a right to his peculiarities."

"Ha-ha! So he has. I guess some people around here think I'm queer—when they try to get money out of me." The ex-alderman's face drew into sober lines almost at once, as he turned back to Brock. "Well, what's your idea of the motive, Mr. Brock?"

"I haven't any idea that I'd care to talk about—at least not yet," he added dryly and with emphasis.

"Oh, I see. Well, excuse me. You're a witness, aren't you? Coroner's jury sits in the schoolhouse, don't it? I'll have to be there. Well, good-by, everybody."

BROCK at last succeeded in making his purchases and evading the curiosity of those he met, and withdrawing from Dr. Wylie's ostentatious friendliness, hurried home with his purchases to Aunt Julia. That night, of course, over the supper table, Mrs. Magruder could talk of nothing but the murder until her daughter, a school-girl of twelve, began giving signs of fright and hysteria at the approach of darkness, when by common consent the subject was abandoned. And when little Julia, her lessons finished in some sort of a way, was sent up to bed, she demanded that Mrs. Magruder should go upstairs with her.

When they had disappeared and the house became quiet, Brock laid aside the newspaper and took out a pad trying to set down in orderly fashion the lines of investigation that might lead to the solution of the mystery. For Krouse had, in a way, taken Brock into his confidence and deserv'd whatever help the newspaper writer could give him. Brock wrote the clues down in a column thus:

1. Finger-prints to be photographed:
 - (a) One on book.
 - (b) One on desk. Note: Are they different?
2. The dead man.
 - (a) He was a Frenchman. Perhaps he and Trudeau had known each other on the other side.
 - (b) Had he left some trace in Laurel or Northampton?
3. People who came to the house: Dr. Wylie, Squire McDermott, Archie McDermott, Mallory the feed man, his son and a Mr. Daumier. Find out about Daumier.
4. The safety-pin.
 - (a) Torn from a shirt. Query: A small fragment of the shirt might be found somewhere in the room.
5. The meaning (or influence) of the Blue Beelzebub.
6. If Trudeau killed the man, where is the money?
7. If Trudeau is dead, who has taken it?
8. Get on the track of Trudeau.
9. Watch Johnson. Search his room.
10. Possible footprints in soft ground outside. Note: Mud on slain man's shoes.
11. Krouse's question about buttoned shoes.
12. The paper match.
13. See cashier of bank.
14. "Penguin Island"—irrelevant but startling.

HAVING made these notations, Brock sat and stared at them, adding a note here, a query there, planning in the morning to find Krouse and offer help on every one of these lines of investigation. He was intensely interested in the problem and so absorbed in his thoughts that he was oblivious of the passage of time.

But at last he put the list aside, thoroughly weary from his long day. Curiously enough, a delicious languor came over him, and he closed his eyes, yielding to it. Nice girl, Judith Kennedy—fine forehead, lovely smile after tears . . . like a rainbow-end after rain. He must try to . . .

Suddenly Brock started upright, drowsy no more. There was a sound—an unusual sound at the window near him, as though some one were fumbling at the shutters, which Mrs. Magruder always fastened at night. And as he looked something appeared, wriggling between the slats, a square white object, and with a slight tap against the pane, fell upon the sill. Fully awake to the fact of an unusual visitor, instead of opening the window, he rushed to the door, out on the portico and around the house. The night was pitch black after the glare of the room, so that it was a long moment before his eyes were accus-

tomed to the obscurity, but he was certain that he could make out a shadow flitting among the trees in the direction of Trudeau's place. He ran a few paces staring into the darkness, but he saw nothing more nor heard any sound. So he went back to the house. Fortunately, the commotion he had made had awakened no one. So he went into the dining-room, raised the window and removed the square white object from where it had fallen. It was an envelope and bore his name printed with a pencil in square letters. Brock opened it under the glare of the lamp. The contents were also printed roughly in pencil and he read as follows:

KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT AT THE
INQUEST OR YOU'LL BE IN WRONG
FOR THE GOODS ARE ON YOU.

There was no signature. Brock read the thing again and again, more and more puzzled and astonished. What did it all mean? "You'll be in wrong for the goods are on you." Extraordinary message—and surely a mistake. And yet who could have written it (and of course delivered it), but some one interested in concealing the actual criminal. A warning and a threat! But why warn or threaten one whose testimony was no more valuable than that of anyone else who had seen the body—Johnson, Krouse, Dr. Burlingame, for instance.

Trudeau! The thought came in a flash—then almost as quickly was relinquished. The old Frenchman would hardly have been equal to such a hurried flight in the dark. And why would Trudeau be warning him to keep his mouth shut when he knew that Brock had no knowledge whatever of the killing or of any of the events that had led up to it?

The murderer himself! There seemed no doubt about that. The man who had done the killing had been here just outside the window, less than ten minutes ago. It seemed as though the Fates, just to tantalize him in his quest, had put opportunity in his way and then as suddenly withdrawn it. And as he read the message, he had a growing conviction that there was no nonsense about it, that the man who had written and brought it was desperately in earnest. A lunatic? That was a possibility not suggested by any of the evidence brought to light by Julius Krouse. For who but a lunatic would write: "You'll be in wrong for the goods are on you"?

That meant that the bearer of the message wished to incriminate Brock in order to keep him silent on the witness-stand as to Trudeau. Or perhaps the murderer thought that Trudeau's friendship for Brock was great enough to make him the recipient of the old man's confidences of names and facts, a history of the past and the possible threats that had made Trudeau so apprehensive during the weeks leading up to the crime itself.

In these ways Brock tried to invent plausible explanations to fit the case, but only succeeded in getting his mind more confused. He paced the floor, staring from time to time at the paper in his hand until late into the night.

CHAPTER V

THE next morning Mrs. Magruder called Brock, and a glance at the clock showed him to his surprise that it was eight o'clock. He had slept seven hours.

Her message was imperative:

"I didn't want to wake you, but Julius Krouse is downstairs and says he's got to see you at once."

Brock sprang up.

"Tell him I'll be down in five minutes."

And then as an afterthought: "If he's in a hurry, tell him to come up here while I dress."

Brock had just slipped on a pair of trousers when there was a knock on the door and Julius Krouse was shown in. The longitudinal lines in his long face had deepened; he needed a shave; his stiff sandy gray hair was rumpled, and he looked very tired. But his eyes were bright under their heavy brows.

"Sorry to get you up a'ready, Mr. Brock, but I've got to have you help me."

"Sit down. Had any breakfast?"

"No. Been up all night."

Brock put his head outside the door, calling to his Aunt Julia for breakfast for two.

"Don't you, now, bother about me. A cup of coffee maybe—"

Brock waved his hand as he gazed at the little man. "Well—anything new?"

Krouse nodded and spoke shortly:

"Trudeau took the milk-train at two o'clock in the morning at Baker's Crossing. The railroad people traced him for me as far down as Reading. There we lost him."

"Philadelphia?"

"Yah, or maybe New York. I can't do nothing more yet awhile with Trudeau. We know now he aint dead. We got out bills with his description—we find him maybe by and by. But there's other lines. I can't work 'em alone. I got to have help anyways."

Brock nodded. "I was going to look for you this morning. Something's turned up, Mr. Krouse. See here—" And he gave the little man the envelope and slip of paper that had come through the shutter the night before. Krouse stared at the message, frowning, and then read aloud slowly:

"Keep your mouth shut at the inquest or you'll be in wrong, for the goods are on you."

Then he looked up at Brock, his gaze slowly concentrating.

"You!" he said. "Why should you be keeping your mouth shut? What you got to hide?"

Brock laughed. "That's what I want to know."

"What goods anybody got on you?"

"Nothing. I take it as a sort of threat. But I don't know why anybody should threaten me."

BRIEFLY he told Krouse exactly what had happened. The man did not take his gaze from Brock while he spoke, but the lines of his face twisted in almost comic bewilderment.

"Kind of nutty. Aint?" he muttered. "It's maybe a joke a'ready."

"No. It's no joke. The man who wrote that thinks I know he committed the crime."

"For why should he think you know it?"

"I don't know. Unless he believes Trudeau told me enough of what he was scared of, so that I could guess the rest."

"And Trudeau didn't now—tell you nothing?"

Brock turned irritably from the mirror, where he was tying his cravat. "Good God, man, do you think I'm fool enough to monkey with a buzzsaw like this?"

Krouse smiled. "No," he said quietly, "I just wanted to see how you'd act up."

Brock laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, I don't know anything about that message or the man that sent it, any more than you do. I wish I'd had sense enough to run through the woods after him."

"I guess then, maybe, you wouldn't be here, tying your necktie."

"Then you've stopped thinking it was a joke."

"I never yet thought so," said Krouse. And then after a silence while Brock brushed his hair: "But you got to say something when things come sideways at you, aint? It's got no sense to it with the other clues. It's all *schtrublich*."

Brock led the way down to the breakfast-table and Krouse followed, silent and deep in thought. But his fit of abstraction did not prevent him from eating ravenously of eggs, sausage and hot cakes. Mrs. Magruder hovered about, rather dubious of the importance of this fellow Krouse from Northampton, who had not been taught that knife and fork are not interchangeable implements. When she went out into the kitchen, Mr. Krouse took out of his pocket a cigar like a corkscrew that had been run over by a trolley. This he lighted while Brock filled his pipe.

"This case is getting complicated. Now I got to go to Trudeau's and make some finger-prints—Trooper Coales is there all night. Also I got to ask Johnson some things, maybe look in his room in the attic again. Also see some footprints around the house where nobody's been. I guess maybe later you and me, we find some footprints here also. But I can't be two places all at once, now can I? You got to go to Northampton and try to find out if this dead man left any traces. He couldn't stay in Laurel; the Laurel Mountain House aint open for the season a'ready. This Frenchman must have stayed in Northampton. You go to the hotels there. Maybe when I'm through at Trudeau's I come down and go with you to see the bank cashier, this after'."

Brock grinned with satisfaction. Mr. Krouse had covered almost every important clue that Brock had noted.

"But the inquest—wasn't that to be this morning?"

"We put it off coupla days. I got to have time. Can't do nothing all in a minute. The District Attorney, John Corson, says it's all right."

Krouse rose and followed Brock to the door, filling Mrs. Magruder's chaste hall-way with the evil-smelling smoke of his corkscrew cigar.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Brock," Krouse said. "Have you got a pistol?"

"No, I haven't."

Krouse brought forth an automatic. "I been thinking maybe you need this," he went on. "And since that *bartich* note you got, I'm sure of it. Better be on the safe side a'ready. If that fellow comes snooping around here, you take a shot for him."

Brock looked at the weapon and stuck it in his pocket, aware that the affair was becoming more serious for him than he had expected.

"I wont let him get away next time," he muttered. Outside, he told Krouse of his thought about the safety-pin.

"That safety-pin, Mr. Krouse—it was bent. Don't you think there ought to be somewhere a piece of the shirt-collar it was torn out of?"

Krouse grinned and punched the self-starter of his muddy flivver.

"I forgot to tell you maybe the murderer wore a light blue collar with white streaks in it. Ha-ha! It aint good to tell everything you know all at once till you have to."

Brock could only grin faintly in reply.

"I meet you at the Farmers' National Bank, Northampton, one o'clock," cried Mr. Krouse, above the roar of the shivering flivver, which departed up the road toward the Trudeau house, sputtering blue smoke and mud in all directions.

IN half an hour the willing Brock was in Northampton. He parked the Magruder car alongside the curb of the Northampton Hotel and went in. There were only two hotels, for the county seat was a town of scarcely more than two thousand inhabitants, and transient visitors were few. Brock had an idea that this clue might yield something, an opinion obviously shared by Mr. Krouse. Brock chose the Northampton Hotel first because it was the larger, the place to which a stranger would be sent from the railroad station which was just around the corner.

Behind the desk a thin man with an Uncle Sam chin-whisker was reading the morning newspaper. He was the proprietor, and his name was Mehl. Brock described the Frenchman as well as he could, and Mr. Mehl discarded his paper and stood up.

"A stranger—a Frenchy about fifty, with blue eyes, gray-brown hair? Why—yes, Mr. Brock, two-three days ago."

The hotel register lay open on the desk and Brock glanced over it.

"Is this it—Georges Merillat?"

"That's him."

"Did he have on a gray suit, soft black hat, a dark blue cravat and patent leather shoes?"

"Yeah, that's the man. But he wa'n't in yesterday."

"No. He wasn't in—he's dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes. He's the man found murdered up at Laurel."

"My God! And I've just been reading about it, Merillat—"

"That's the man. No doubt of it. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much. He didn't speak very good. He was only here since Thursday."

"What was he doing here?"

"I don't know. I made out he was going to look at some farming land to buy. Nice-enough fella—kinder hang-dog-down-in-the-mouth, now I come to think of it."

"Did he have any visitors?"

"Not that I know of. Wait a minute."

He went to the foot of the steps in the hall and yelled shrilly: "Tillie! Oh, Tillie! Come down here." In a few moments a stout woman appeared on the steps, removing a towel that she had tied around her head. Mr. Mehl introduced her as Mrs. Mehl.

"Say, Tillie—what you know about the Frenchy, Merillat? In his room most of the time, wa'n't he?"

"Until yesterday. He aint been back."

BROCK explained why, and Mrs. Mehl showed immediate excitement. "Well, I declare!" she gasped at last. "Number 35—I had an idea something was queer about that fella."

"Anybody come here to see him?" Brock asked.

"He stayed in his room mostly. No. Nobody came here to the hotel. He may have seen people outside. So he's dead! Well, Pop, I guess we're out his board and lodging."

"Did he have any baggage?"

"A bag. I saw it in Number 35 this morning when Cora was cleaning up."

"I've got to look in it."

"Well," Mrs. Mehl said after a glance at the visitor, "I guess it's all right if Julius Krouse sent you."

They led the way up the stair, and Brock followed until Mrs. Mehl took out a pass-key and opened the door of

Number 35. Everything was in order, the bed made, a gray overcoat on the clothes-rack. A brush, comb, toothbrush and a battered suitcase at the foot of the bed completed the signs of occupancy.

It was an old bag, rather battered, having several labels—which Brock noted for future reference, a sticker of one of the smaller steamers of the French Line, another of the American Express. He carried it to the table by the window and tried to open it, but the lock was fastened. So Mrs. Mehl got a screw-driver, and they pried it open. Underwear, socks, collars, cravat, a time-table, a receipted bill of the Hotel Maopin in New York and a packet of letters and papers tied with an old blue tape. Brock could not restrain a gasp of satisfaction as he eagerly took them out and examined them. They were all in French, some of them much soiled and rubbed from frequent reading, others more recent, in an ink that had lost no color. Mr. and Mrs. Mehl were peering over Brock's shoulder, so he carried a chair to the window with an air of deliberation.

"I'll be here for a while," he said suggestively. "I'll let you know if I want anything." And then with an inspiration, he added: "There was money in the dead man's clothes; I think I can promise that you'll get what he owed you."

They took the hint and went toward the door.

"By the way," Brock said, "you needn't let anybody know I'm here. And don't say anything about this Merillat being the dead man."

Mrs. Mehl nodded and shoved the reluctant chin-whisker down the hallway in front of her. Brock closed the door and assured himself that there were no items of importance that he had overlooked anywhere else in the room. The pocket of the overcoat revealed a pair of French gloves bearing the mark of the Bon Marché, Paris, and nothing else.

He took up the letter that seemed to be the oldest. It was dated at Tours, March, 1922, and was written under the letter-head of a firm of lawyers, addressed to Pierre Duval, Rue des Petits Souris, Paris, and was as follows:

Dear Sir:

Through the agency of an old friend of yours, Madame Benoit of this city, we have at last succeeded in discovering an address which will possibly permit a letter to reach you. If you are the Pierre Duval who



They pried it open. . . . A packet of letters and papers!

lived in Tours until 1890, and you will communicate with us at once, you will hear something greatly to your advantage. Having received positive assurance and proofs of your identity, the writer will call upon you and make the necessary arrangements.

I need not add that my firm has no connections or affiliations with the police, and that all communications will be strictly confidential.

I am, monsieur, &c.

RAOUL BONTemps.

The mention of the French police created at once an intense interest, and Brock found another letter dated the following month in the same year, from Raoul Bontemps to Pierre Duval.

Dear Sir:

I cannot find it in my heart to blame you for your prudence and am therefore addressing this communication, as you request, to

the *Poste Restante*, since you have already taken the precaution to change your address. As you desire further information, I will say that a client of ours who must be nameless is acting on behalf of one who once did you a wrong and is very anxious to make a proper restitution for all that you have suffered. Accordingly, when proper proofs of your identity are given to us, a sum of money will be deposited monthly to your credit in a bank of Paris.

I hope I need not add a second time that our transactions will be strictly confidential. It must be obvious to you that had we been interested in your past or your escape from prison we could have caused your arrest at your old address. Awaiting your reply, I am, monsieur, &c.

RAOUL BONTemps.

THE pot was stirring. Was Georges Merrillat Pierre Duval? An escaped convict who feared the French police and had been in hiding in Paris? But what was

he doing in Northampton? And where did Trudeau come into the story?

A third letter several months later was the next in sequence and referred to a satisfactory meeting and agreement that had taken place at Tours between Pierre Duval and Raoul Bontemps. The transaction, whatever it had been, was closed.

A fourth letter was written in a feminine hand, expressed in an argot of the provinces and was difficult to decipher. Briefly the writer expressed herself as sorry for the accidental part she had had in Duval's misfortunes. She wrote that she was very poor and sick and asked for money. It was signed "Jacqueline Benoit."

The letter that Duval sent in reply must have been a refusal, for the next letter of Madame Benoit to Duval contained a threat to expose him to the police if he did not comply with her request. The two letters revealed a former relationship between them but gave none of the clues that Brock was seeking.

Disappointed, he turned to the next letter, a typed communication from the cashier of a bank in Paris. It had been written two years later and referred to an overdraft of his account. Another letter from the cashier of the bank: "It is quite impossible for me to reveal the real identity of the person who sends these deposits to your account. We have referred to him as Monsieur Vibert. We have no hesitancy in informing you that that is not his name. It will be useless for you to inquire further of this bank. Otherwise at your service, monsieur, we are, &c. &c."

Brock was beginning to believe that his investigation was to yield him nothing, when in turning over another letter from Jacqueline Benoit, his quick glance caught a name that seemed familiar to him—Bertrand Daumier. He stared at the name, his mind working rapidly. Daumier! Wasn't a man named Daumier one of Emile Trudeau's visitors? And if Brock's memory was not faulty, wasn't he also a brother-in-law of Squire McDermott's? Brock turned back to the first page and read the letter carefully. The phrases that rewarded his search were these:

I have not been idle. Monsieur Bontemps is a good *avocat* in his office and a very bad one on a fête-day when there is much champagne to be drunk. My brother's child is very pretty and very discreet. She has succeeded in making Monsieur Raoul

foolish about her. And one night he told her the truth. The real name of the miraculous Monsieur Vibert is Bertrand Daumier, and he is an importer of silks in New York, America.

Voilà, I have told you. I have requited you for the harm I once had done you. And you too must repay me, for as you know, I am not without weapons that I shall know how to use. The purse of this Monsieur Bertrand Daumier is bottomless. You should therefore know how to make this information profitable to us both. It is quite possible that he is the very man you're looking for, though I cannot believe that he would act as he has done unless through a third person. You should go to New York. Perhaps then there will be enough for me and a little to help enlarge the *dot* of my little Celestine, who will be wanting one day to get married. . . . Before you go—a thousand francs will keep me satisfied and comfortable.

HURRIEDLY Brock ran through the other letters. If he expected to find one in Trudeau's hand, he was disappointed. There was nothing that seemed to bear directly upon the Trudeau case.

A blackmailer, himself blackmailed!

Brock put the letters upon the table and took out his pipe and pouch, smoking for a moment furiously, while he tried to reconstruct the story of Pierre Duval. A crime somewhere in his background, perhaps years prior to the Bontemps letter in 1922. The thoughtless phrase of Jacqueline Benoit, Duval's mistress, that had led to his capture by the police. Prison, escape! And then the letters of this firm of lawyers which suddenly brought the escaped convict a gift of money from the man who had wronged him. Daumier was merely the agent. For the sentence, "It is quite possible that he is the man you're looking for," seemed to indicate clearly Madame Benoit's knowledge of the fountain of all this wealth that the useful Daumier dispensed through the Paris bank.

Was this unnamed man Emile Trudeau? That was the question. It seemed very likely. Daumier was Trudeau's friend—an old friend, probably, who had acted in his behalf with the firm of lawyers in Tours and later with the Paris bank, Daumier had been discreet. But all his defenses had fallen before the wheedling tongue of a pretty girl and an amorous French lawyer. Bontemps had told. Perhaps he had thought it didn't matter what he told, since he had already received his fee.

Then Georges Merillat, alias Pierre Duval (for this identity now seemed certain)

had come to America and met Daumier and thus in some way discovered the address of Emile Trudeau, who was the man he sought.

And the "wrong" that Trudeau had done to Duval—what was it? What wrong could Emile Trudeau have done to anyone? And yet the story dovetailed so neatly. Trudeau's isolation, his dislike of people, his recent spells of irritation, nervousness and apprehension, his anxiety to get his letters—Duval's letters about a sin of the past that had at last found Trudeau out. A sin that had found Trudeau out because his accusing conscience had turned his heart toward the sufferings of the man he had wronged. All this was like Trudeau—who thought he could atone a fault of his past by doing good in secret, not knowing how much he risked by this belated generosity.

Brock tried to make a picture of the incidents the night of the killing. The visit, by arrangement, of this Georges Merillat to the house of Emile Trudeau. The money produced, a quarrel over some detail in which Merillat drew his French revolver and shot at Trudeau, who—

And then suddenly the whole tissue of Brock's imagined story fell to pieces. For who was the man in the blue shirt who smoked cigarettes? How about Daumier? And with Trudeau traced to Reading, who was the man who had dropped the threatening note through the slats of the shutter, and had fled like a deer into the woods when Brock had gone after him? There was no answer. Brock knocked out his pipe and picked up the letters again. As Krouse had said: "kind of nutty—aint?"

CHAPTER VI

IT was half-past twelve when Brock, having reread all the letters of Pierre Duval, word by word, in order to be sure that nothing important had escaped him, gathered them all together, tied them with their blue tape and put them into his pocket. The curious Mr. Mehl came to the door asking if there was anything that he could do. The man was eager to know the result of his investigation, but Brock told him nothing except that he expected Mr. Krouse at any moment and asking that he be shown up as soon as he arrived.

Brock's duty was, of course, clear.

Krouse represented the District Attorney's office and the law. Brock would be obliged to turn these letters over to Krouse, and to tell him, if asked, what they revealed. But he had great hopes that Krouse would not be swerved from his original theory that the murder was probably done by the man who wore the gold safety-pin. And he intended to suggest that the letters need not be used at the inquest except as a general confirmation of the blackmail theory, should they be needed.

Mr. Krouse arrived a few minutes before one, wearing the placid demeanor of a cat that has just eaten a canary. He had an air of accomplishment, and listened to Brock's story, slightly detached, as though still enjoying pleasant reminiscences of his feast. The look of weariness had left him, and when Brock finished speaking, he nodded his head sagely.

"Well, Mr. Brock, you done pretty good a'ready. We got some past history to fall back on. This man Daumier will have something to say. We got to keep an eye on Daumier. I met up with him last summer once at the Laurel Mountain House. His sister is the wife of Squire McDermott."

He made no further comment, so Brock asked him how it affected his opinions about the crime.

Krouse gave Brock his craftiest smile as he rose. "If I told you that, you'd know as much as I do oncet! Now you come along with me, and we'll find out something about this here money."

The Farmers' National Bank was on the next block, and when they had explained their mission, they were shown into the inner sanctum, the private office.

Mr. Shaver the cashier showed the usual caution, but at last, when closely pressed by Mr. Krouse, admitted that Emile Trudeau had kept an account at the bank.

"We got to have all the cards on the table, Mr. Shaver," said Krouse. "You got your duty to Mr. Trudeau a'ready, but the law comes first. And I got to ask you what for kind of a man is Trudeau in money ways? He's pretty well fixed—aint? What you know about him?"

Mr. Shaver stroked his chin dubiously, but at last admitted in plain terms that Emile Trudeau was very rich.

"Kept a big balance, yet?"

"No, not a big balance. He didn't seem to need money for himself. But we paid

him interest on anything over a thousand dollars of deposits."

"H-m! And he didn't ever have a big sum of money here?"

"No, not usually. But he had resources. Investments in New York, stocks and bonds in his safe-deposit box."

"Um! Did he, now, ask you in the last week or so to provide for him a large sum in cash?"

The backbone of Mr. Shaver's resistance was already broken, and at the question he brought out some cigars.

"Well, Mr. Krouse, I guess I better tell you. Since I heard about the murder up at Castle Rock, I been thinking I ought to go to the courthouse and tell what I know." He lighted his cigar and sat back in his chair. "I'll say I'm surprised to see you, because from all accounts of the crime, there didn't seem to be any signs of money involved."

"Except these here, maybe," and Krouse laid upon the table the slips of paper he had found. "Money straps, aint?"

"Yes, they're probably ours. But I'm willing to tell you all I know. Two weeks ago Mr. Trudeau came in here and asked me to have twenty thousand dollars in cash for him so that he could get it by the seventeenth—that was last Friday. He produced from his safe-deposit box negotiable securities for a trifle more than that amount."

"And you said you'd leave him have it?"

Mr. Shaver nodded.

"It was an unusual sum of money to pass over the counter when a certified check would do as well—so unusual that I got new money from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and made a note of the serial numbers."

Krouse's long face broke into wide longitudinal wrinkles. "Well, that's about the best news I've heard, now, in weeks, Mr. Shaver. You aint cashier of a big bank for nothing, aint."

"Well, it didn't cost anything, and I was a little worried. You see we don't pass that much cash over the counter once in a lifetime here in Northampton."

"Well, that's fine! And Mr. Trudeau come here to get this money last Friday?"

"Yes."

"Anybody with him?"

"No. That is—he came in the bank by himself."

"Drove down, didn't he?"

"I guess so."

"Trudeau didn't drive a car, did he, Mr. Brock?" Krouse asked.

"I think perhaps Johnson—"

"Was the colored man Johnson outside in the Ford?"

"I don't know. Wait a minute." Mr. Shaver went to the door of the cages, back of the gratings. "Say, Ab! Did you take notice whether Trudeau's colored man Johnson was outside in the machine when Trudeau came in for his money, Friday?"

"I don't remember," came the dubious reply—followed by the immediate assurance: "Yes sir, he was. I remember now. I could see him through the window from here." Mr. Krouse had risen and followed the cashier to the door.

"Let me see, once," he said, and pushed past Mr. Shaver into the teller's cage. "Nice big window you got." And then, "Where was the Ford?" he asked of the man called Ab.

"Right by the curb, there."

"Would you mind opening the brass window, Mister?"

Ab glanced at the cashier for consent and complied. Mr. Krouse stuck his head out of the window and peered around toward the street.

"Is this the window you passed the money through a'ready?"

"Yes."

"Do you think Johnson saw you, now, pass over the money from where he sat?"

"He couldn't have helped it, if he'd looked."

"Well, did he look?"

"I couldn't tell you that."

"Were there any other people in the bank?"

"I don't—yes, George Reifsnyder of the Laurel Mountain House was here cashing a check. I remember he asked me what the old hermit was doing away from his cave."

"Reifsnyder! Anyone else?"

"I don't think so."

Mr. Krouse gazed once more at the window and turned slowly back into the private office.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Shaver," he said.

KROUSE and Brock walked down the street toward the courthouse. Suddenly Krouse stopped at the door of a men's furnishing store. "I wonder what kind of shirts this fella's got," he said.

They were waited on by a young man with pomaded hair and a sophisticated



The black head of Thomas Jefferson Johnson appeared, eyes rolling. "Hist!"

manner. Krouse produced a piece of tissue paper from his pocket and carefully unfolded it, disclosing a very small fragment of raveled goods.

"You got any, now, shirts to match this here piece?" he asked.

The young man took the fragment between thumb and forefinger, examining it carefully.

"Looks like linen and silk," he said. "We don't carry a big line of fine goods. I'll show you what we've got, though." And with this he pulled from his shelves two or three boxes, displaying their contents. None of the shirts that he showed were similar in design or texture to the sample.

"You wont find any shirts like that in Northampton or anywhere around here," said the young man. "Reading, maybe. More likely New York or Philadelphia."

"Much obliged," replied Krouse with a grin. And wrapping the precious fragment again in its tissue paper, he led the way out of the store.

"I told you, once, our fella was tony," he said to Brock. "Now maybe we go back to Magruder's and see what we can do about these here footprints. You go on back; I got to stop at the hotel, take this Frenchy's things to the courthouse and see the district attorney."

THAT was a busy afternoon. Mr. Krouse still wore his cat-and-canary smile, but Brock's curiosity as to his morning's work at Castle Rock was not gratified. For at every leading question Mr. Krouse put on his wise look and repeated his remark: "If I told you that, you know as much as I do a'ready."

The lawn at Mrs. Magruder's showed traces of footprints, but the grass had prevented the formation of a very definite outline. The indentations of the toes were deeply marked, bearing out Brock's tale that the intruder had run away from the house rapidly as Brock had come out on the portico. The softer ground near the fence had preserved the impressions closely.

The shoes that the man wore were not square-toed like most of those worn by the farmers or laboring men of the community. The footprints had been made by shoes rather pointed than rounded at the toes, a fairly new pair of shoes with rubber heels.

"Here is where he stopped behind this here tree when you ran out looking for him a'ready," said Krouse, leaning forward eagerly. The marks were very distinct, for the surface of the ground, denuded of grass, had presented a fairly firm surface. Had he trodden on wax, the impression of the shoes of the man could not have been more definite. "He'd weigh about a hundred and seventy maybe," Krouse announced. "And he wears about a Number nine, medium width. That makes him, say, five feet nine or ten—"

"High arches. He's young, Mr. Krouse."

"Yah. He can run one hundred yards in wet ground while you come from the dining-room through the door to the side of the house. You take out your watch, once, and tell me how long it took before you got around here."

BROCK obeyed, timing his actions as closely as he could—four seconds of curiosity, two of indecision, two more to reach the front door, five to run down the steps and around the house.

"About thirteen seconds, Mr. Krouse," Brock replied, rather astounded at the revelation.

"Yah. I knew by the deep marks of the toes he wasn't wasting no time."

He followed Krouse to the three-rail fence, which Krouse inspected closely. There was a smear of mud on it where a foot had touched. Krouse climbed the next panel and stood on the other side.

"This fella waited for you behind that there tree quite some time, Mr. Brock. Maybe he hoped you'd follow him out here under the trees where it was dark. He's pretty desperate, looks like—I guess you're right. He thinks you know more about that murder than you do. Aint?"

"How do you get that?"

"Well, he didn't go away in any hurry. He took his time getting over this fence yet. You see how he picks his way slow along, until he comes to the other fence to the pike. There's heel-marks. I think we bring plaster of Paris tomorrow, Mr. Brock, before some of these dumm Dutchies walk around here a'ready."

The little man brought out two of his queer cigars, offering one to his companion. But Brock took out his pipe. It seemed that a moment of retrospection had arrived. Brock had learned that questions only made the little man silent and elusive. So he sat on the fence, stuffing his pipe and looking off toward Castle Rock. Mr. Krouse puffed vigorously for a moment, and then at last Brock's patience was rewarded.

"Us, we're getting warmer, Mr. Brock. But we got to get warmer yet. I aint got no doubts yet old Trudeau didn't kill that Frenchy Merillat. Mind, if I hadn't found evidence another fella was in the fight, things would look bad for Trudeau a'ready. This Frenchy had something on him. Trudeau was ready to pay blackmail to keep him quiet. They might of had a quarrel, and Merillat might of attacked Trudeau. But if Trudeau hadn't run away, he'd only got to show the bullet-hole of the Frenchy's pistol and the pistol itself to prove he killed the fella in self-defense. Where's that pistol, Mr. Brock? Who's got it? Did Trudeau take it away with him? I been looking everywhere for it. I found out a whole lot of things, but I didn't find no pistol. Trudeau ran away, not because he killed Merillat, but because he had something else to hide. He didn't know you'd find those letters at the hotel. Maybe there was, now, other reasons for why he had to go away. If this here other tony fella killed the Frenchy, Trudeau saw him do it. This tony fella might of made Trudeau go away so he wouldn't testify against him, a'ready. Trudeau was scared of this fella too—more scared than he was of Merillat. Maybe the tony fella found out all about both of them. Maybe it's not Trudeau who took the money, but this fella who came to Trudeau's house when he wasn't invited to come. Maybe he was in the house a'ready when Merillat came for his money—"

"You believe that?" Brock broke in.

Krouse nodded. "Somebody was hiding in those there bushes near the kitchen door. You can't make nothing of the footprints, since those dumm Dutchies from Laurel came snooping around a'ready—walking over everywhere. If it wasn't Merillat, it was this tony fella. What was he doing there?"

"You are getting warmer, Mr. Krouse."

"Not hot yet. But I got some lines out maybe to land this tony fish." Krouse

knocked the ash from his corkscrew cigar against the fence rail. "Say, I got to find a fella five feet nine or ten, fancy dresser, with shirts of silk and linen and nice shoes, from New York or Philadelphia, maybe, with rubber heels. Age—between twenty-five and thirty-five years. Weight around a hundred and seventy. Smokes American cigarettes, has blond curly hair and a split in his thumb—"

Krouse was leaning against the fence, his arms folded, looking into the distance toward Castle Rock, thinking of the items that he enumerated. If he had not been so absorbed in his thoughts, he would have seen the slight start that his companion made, the sudden wide distention of the pupils of Brock's eyes, and the quick furtive motion of his right hand to his pocket. For Brock was so bewildered that he almost toppled down from his seat on the fence-rail. In his right-hand coat pocket, his forefinger nervously rubbed the ball of his thumb, on which he would carry to his grave the mark of a German machine-gun bullet. If Mr. Krouse had said that the hair of the murderer was brown instead of blond and curly, Brock could almost have imagined that he himself had been the murderer. It was a remarkable coincidence, but as a moment passed, he regained assurance from his own knowledge that he had not been at Trudeau's since the previous Thursday.

"Blond and curly—how did you find that out, Mr. Krouse?"

"Three hairs between the Frenchy's fingers a'ready. There was a fight—aint?"

Brock nodded. And then with composure: "And where did you take the thumb-print?" he asked.

"On the table, and on the book on the shelf."

"The thumb-prints were different?"

"Yah. The one on the table didn't have no split."

"Blood marks?"

"Not on the book. That was in some stuff like mucilage somebody spilled."

"There were two other men in the room—you're sure?" Brock asked.

"I told you that once, a'ready," said Krouse dryly.

Brock was silent, startled as he had been twice before by the strange chain of circumstances that seemed to be weaving about him, connecting him so obviously with the crime. Brock's old inferiority complex stalked him again. Perhaps his

weeks of insomnia and of nervous tension had robbed him of some of his resiliency, his skill at analysis, his power of concentration. . . . No. He was quite sane, quite reasonable. The mark of the split thumb *was only on the book* which had been brought from the Magruder house with an express purpose. The message thrust through the slats of the shutters had been dropped by a desperate man who feared Brock's friendship with Trudeau and sought to connect him with the crime. These were reasonable explanations. Explanations that would surely satisfy Krouse. Yet Brock did not make them. He wanted to think over the incidents and use them in his own way.

The dry, commonplace tones of Mr. Krouse brought him back to their discussion.

"We got to find where that there money's gone, Mr. Brock. For the fella that took that money killed the Frenchy, Merillat. It aint going to be easy, but I got some ideas. Money don't ever stay long in the dark. And we can identify it. I got those visitors to Trudeau last week summoned for the inquest. Dr. Wylie, Squire McDermott and his boy Archie, the Mallorys and this here Daumier. Maybe we find something a'ready." He climbed back over the fence into Mrs. Magruder's place and led the way slowly across the lawn to his flivver.

AUNT JULIA, who had watched the examination of the premises from a window upstairs, was of course keenly curious to find out why Mr. Krouse walked all over the lawn and examined so carefully the ground behind her beech-tree. So Brock was obliged to tell her of the midnight visitor. He did not tell her of the message he had received, explaining, in answer to her persistent questions, that he had merely heard a noise outside during the night and had gone out while she was asleep, to try to find out who was there. It wasn't a matter of any great importance, he said, but he had thought it wise on account of his friendship with Trudeau and his connection with the case to tell Mr. Krouse about it.

His statement seemed to appease her curiosity but not her doubts.

"I tell you, Joe, I don't like the way you're taking a hand in this affair. You think you're all right, but a man who's only had twenty hours sleep in two weeks

hasn't any business getting excited the way you are. You were sent up here for a rest, and I wouldn't be able to look your mother in the face in Kingdom Come if I don't look after you now. I'm just going to tell this Krouse man to attend to his own business and not come throwing his filthy stogy ashes over my nice carpet."

Brock put his arm around her and kissed her wrinkled brow.

"Why, I'm fit as a fiddle, Aunt Julia. Slept seven hours last night. Didn't you have to call me? Now don't you bother. I'm doing what I can to help Julius Krouse, because I don't want Emile Trudeau to be accused of a crime he didn't commit, and because Krouse is one of the wisest gazaboos that ever came out of musical comedy."

She laughed. "What makes you think he's wise?"

"He's simply a natural-born detective. Maybe it's just his plain Dutch curiosity raised to the power of genius. I thought I knew something about intuition, about the use of negligible details in police investigations, about analysis and deduction, but this Krouse man, as you call him, has the whole New York detective bureau backed off of the map. He's positively uncanny, I tell you."

"And he doesn't believe that Emile Trudeau killed the man?"

"No. He has reasons for not believing so. I'm glad for Trudeau's sake—and for Judith Kennedy's."

Mrs. Magruder's knitting needles clicked comfortably.

"Seems to me, Joe," she ventured, "your interest might be more on Judith's account than Trudeau's."

"Nonsense! Isn't it natural for anybody to be sorry for a girl placed in the position she's in?"

"Besides being a pretty girl, of course. You've noticed that she's very intelligent."

"I haven't had much chance to notice anything. I only know that she's a nice kid, that she's very fond of her uncle and that it looks as if she was up against it."

"But if you say Trudeau didn't kill the man—"

"Well, he's gone, and he's under a cloud. There's a lot of stuff that may come out at the inquest that won't be very pleasant for her."

"You mean about Trudeau's past. There!" She sniffed triumphantly. "I knew there was some reason why Emile

Trudeau was so offish with people. What about him, Joe? Is he a murderer, a spy, or just a counterfeiter?"

Her nephew laughed. "Well, I don't know everything, but I got some ideas a'ready, as Krouse would say. And you don't stop me from being sorry for Miss Kennedy."

"I don't want you to stop being sorry for her. She's one of the nicest girls I know. And I'm not the only one that thinks so," she added significantly.

"Oh, I suppose she has a lot of admirers," he said carelessly; "she ought to have."

Mrs. Magruder laughed.

"Maybe you came along too late, Joe."

He looked out of the window at the clearing west.

She smiled at the back of his head.

"There's Billy Mallory and Archie McDermott. Some said she was engaged to Archie last summer."

"Well, that's none of my business."

"I just thought I'd warn you, Joe. When a man brags about being a woman-hater the way you do, he's just about ready to fall in love with the first petticoat that comes along."

"I'm not in love with Miss Kennedy," he said with dignity, "and I'm going up to Hawleys' now to give her some advice about her testimony at the inquest."

"Well, Joe," Mrs. Magruder returned, "give her my love and tell her if she wants to make a change for a while, my spare room is ready for her. I'll be going up there calling myself tomorrow. By the way, did you know I'd been summoned to the inquest, too?"

"No. I suppose it's just because they think as a neighbor you might know something."

"Well, I don't. But of course I'll go."

AS Brock walked toward the village, he began turning over in his mind how far it would be wise for him to go in preparing Miss Kennedy for the revelations of the mystery of Emile Trudeau's life. If he told her that the District Attorney's office had found definite evidence of the presence of another man who was suspected of the crime, she might be willing to talk more freely of Emile Trudeau's past.

As good fortune would have it, when he turned from the highway into the crossroad leading to the Hawleys' house, he met

Miss Kennedy carrying a suit-case. She said that she was taking some things to Castle Rock, where she was going to give some instructions to the colored man Johnson. He asked permission to accompany her and took the bag from her hand. She was still rather pallid, he thought—more pallid, perhaps, because of the purple shadows around her eyes, for the air and exercise had brought a delicate touch of color into her cheeks.

"I was hoping I would see you again," he said, "because some other things have turned up that I thought you might want to know."

"I did want to see you," she said. "I was so afraid you might think I didn't appreciate your interest."

"My aunt, Mrs. Magruder, asked me to tell you that her spare bedroom is waiting for you. She is coming to see you tomorrow."

"She's very kind. Things are so unsettled in my mind. I don't know yet just what to do. I don't feel like staying at Castle Rock all alone."

"Of course that's impossible," he said.

"If Uncle Emile would only write, tell me something to reassure me. Do you suppose he will, Mr. Brock?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. I suppose he might be afraid that his letters would be intercepted."

"Oh!" She hesitated. "That explains something. A letter forwarded to me from Bryn Mawr looked as though it had been tampered with at the post office. What right have they to do that? It makes me feel as though they suspected *me* of complicity in this terrible affair."

Brock frowned. It was quite like Mr. Julius Krouse to go to this extreme in searching for evidence.

"It's very humiliating," he said. "You could do something about it, probably, but if the letters are innocent, it's hardly worth while."

"Innocent!" she said with a laugh. "Well, rather. This one was from my roommate at college telling me that I'd taken away her tooth-brush by mistake. If Mr. Krouse can make me *particeps criminis* with that information, he's welcome to it."

SHE was trying very hard to regain her courage and her spirits. It seemed very difficult after that for him to speak of Emile Trudeau's past. So he told her first

of his conversations with Mr. Krouse about the clues that had been found, and the convictions of the little man as to the criminal. He did not tell her of the message he had received the night before, for this was Krouse's secret and his own, and would, of course, only mystify her as it had himself. But he thought it wise at last to tell her something of his discoveries at the Northampton Hotel, giving none of the details of the letters, but letting her know in a general way that Mr. Trudeau was the victim of a blackmail plot that was connected with the distant past.

"Blackmail! Why?" she gasped.

"I don't know. Nobody can ever tell us that but Emile Trudeau himself—or possibly Bertrand Daumier."

"Daumier!"

"You know him?"

"Yes. My uncle has known him always. In New York before he moved to Laurel—"

"He has been summoned to appear before the coroner's jury," Brock added.

"Have you any reason to believe that Mr. Daumier knows something of this plot—to blackmail my uncle?"

"Yes, Miss Kennedy, I have," he muttered.

"You mean by all this, that something—something discreditable may be found out about my uncle?"

"I didn't say so," Brock said gently. "I don't know of anything discreditable. Neither does Krouse. What I do know is that your uncle yielded to a demand for blackmail from the Frenchman who was killed, for there was a large sum of money in the house on the night of the murder."

"Money!" she gasped almost in a whisper.

"Twenty thousand dollars. He drew it from the bank in Northampton last Friday. The money has disappeared."

"Who took it—since the man it was brought for is dead?"

"That's the question. Your uncle or some one else. There was another man in your uncle's library that night."

"That poor old man! The leeches! They had come to bleed him. Oh, if I'd only taken the morning train, as I'd planned! They wouldn't have dared. And this dead man—I'm glad he's dead!"

She stopped and turned eagerly toward Brock. "But Uncle Emile didn't kill him. Why should he have brought the money to pay the man if he intended killing him in-

stead? If he wanted the man out of the way, is it reasonable to think he'd lure him to Castle Rock and send for me at the same time? Don't you see how absurd that is, Mr. Brock?"

"Yes. And that sort of an argument will be impressive with the jury." And then: "Did you know of anyone else who might have been in correspondence with your uncle or whose presence had worried him—a younger man than this Frenchman?"

"No—no one. As you know, he rarely went off the place. Billy Mallory was up here, Johnson says—and his father too; but of course that was on business about the hay."

They had entered the drive and approached the kitchen porch.

"Will you wait for me, Mr. Brock? Or do you have to go on? I'll only be here a few minutes."

Brock decided to wait in the driveway.

The body of the Frenchman, he knew, had been removed to an undertaking establishment, and only the colored man Johnson remained at Castle Rock during the day. He had been given permission to go to the house of a friend in Laurel to sleep at night. Though the weather had cleared and the sun shone brightly, the square pile of masonry seemed more forbidding to Brock than on the morning two days ago when he had suffered such depression at the sight of it in the gloom of a rainy day.

HE was about to stroll down the driveway to examine the exterior of the building under the window of the library when he heard a sound from behind the lattice that protected the kitchen porch. He glanced around and the black head of Thomas Jefferson Johnson protruded, his eyes rolling.

"Hist!"

Brock turned and approached him. He was still dubious about this man. Krouse's questions of the cashier and paying teller at the Farmers' Bank indicated a wish to find out if Johnson knew that the money was in the house. Brock remembered that Krouse wasn't altogether satisfied about the soundness of Johnson's slumbers on the night of the murder. He recalled, too, the curious question about the buttoned shoes and remembered the tiny beads of per-

spiration during the preliminary examination. Nor could Brock forget the strange way Johnson's bloodshot eyes had followed him about on the morning of the discovery of the murder.

"You want to speak to me?" Brock asked.

"Yassir. Miss Judith's upstairs in her room. I don't want her to hear."

"Is it anything important?"

"It's about dis yere Mr. Krouse. He been asking me a lot of fool questions, like he thought I know all about who kill dat man."

"Well, that's his job, Johnson. If you don't know anything about it, you ought to be able to prove it before the jury."

"I doan like de way dis yere Mr. Krouse treat me—makin' Officer Coales watch me en all. What right he got to go up in my room in the attic en poke aroun' in my closet en bureau drawers?"

"If you're innocent, you haven't got anything to be scared of."

"Innocent! My Gawd! You ought to know!"

The words seemed to have burst from the colored man in spite of himself. His eyes stared with a strange intensity until Brock twisted toward him, frowning.

"What the hell do you mean?" he growled.

Johnson's gaze dropped and fell away. He shuffled his feet and moved his shoulders nervously.

"I—I mean jes dat—I been round here a long while, an' nobody ever suspicioned me 'bout nothing."

"Oh!"

"I done tell de truth, so help me Gawd."

"Well, tell it to the jury," said Brock dryly.

The man glanced over his shoulder toward the door behind him and then leaned forward, his eyes popping.

"En you," he asked, "you gwine tell dat jury all you knows?"

"Yes, I am," said Brock shortly.

There was a curious quality of tenseness in Johnson's voice and in his manner, unwarranted by the nature of his questions. The man had been frightened by Krouse, of course, and he was still frightened at the possibilities that lay before him at the inquest. But no man whose conscience was clear need give such signs of anxiety.

The next big installment of this intriguing mystery story by the author of "Sackcloth and Scarlet" will appear in our forthcoming February issue.

The Silent Race

By

LEMUEL DE BRA

Illustrated by William Molt

This notably attractive story of Chinatown life is by the man who wrote "Tears of the Poppy," "The Return of Stiletto Sofie" and many other good ones.



"NO," said Captain of Detectives Dan Creave, shaking his head stubbornly, "there isn't a bit of use in reopening the case. Probably a hundred people had good reasons to want to kill old Chock Doy. Nobody is sorry he was bumped off. Chinatown is glad to be rid of him—the crookedest gambler, the cruellest slave-owner, the worst criminal that ever cursed San Francisco's Chinatown. Probably a hundred Chinks know who did it, too! But what good does that do us? They wont talk!"

I remember the look of keen disappointment that came over Detective Lyons' face. Chinatown had been his particular charge for many years, and he felt responsible for every criminal case that arose in the quarter. The mysterious murder of Chock Doy had occurred while Lyons was on his way eastward with two On Leong tong killers wanted by the New York police. In his absence, and because of the prominence of Chock Doy, the case had been handled personally by Captain Creave.

Knowing Captain Creave's exceptional ability and the absolute honesty and thoroughness with which he carried through

every investigation, it seemed useless to reopen a case on which he had failed. Detective Lyons had not one scrap of new evidence; but he felt certain that with what little help I might render, and especially with the assistance of our old friend Chen Wan, he could uncover things that otherwise would remain forever hidden from the knowledge of any Occidental.

"They won't talk!" Creave went on. "I tried every way I knew to get 'em to open up. No use! —Chen," he smiled up at our Chinese friend, "when I was a kid in school, I learned that the Chinese were the yellow race. But do you know what I'd call 'em? *The silent race!* Everything they do is done stealthily, silently. They even wear padded slippers so they can walk without making a noise. And as for talking—well, they wont talk!"

Chen Wan nodded silently. Whatever he thought of Creave's opinion of the Chinese, there wasn't the slightest expression in his dark face and long, slant eyes. He helped himself to one of the Captain's cigarettes, lighted it with a graceful gesture of his slender brown hand, and inhaled thoughtfully.

"Captain," I spoke up, "what you say is true—in a way; but that's only one side of the complex Chinese nature. There's another side that foreigners not in the confidence of the Chinese never see. Now neither Chen nor I know a thing about this murder case; but we do know something of the Chinese, and if we can help Mr. Lyons—"

"I'm not promising anything, Captain!" Lyons hastened to put in. "But I'm thinkin' that with Mr. Minturn an' Chen Wan to give me the right send-off, I might turn something. An', Captain, after a better detective than I'll ever be has drawn a blank, I don't want to bust up there on my own hook. See? I think I can find who murdered Chock Doy; but I want the papers to say I did it *under your orders*."

That was a clever bit of diplomacy! Captain Creave flung up his hands.

"Go do your damndest!" he growled good-naturedly. "But remember what I said: You're wasting your time trying to get anything out of those Chinks. They won't talk!"

A SHARP crash of cymbals, the piercing wail of flageolets, assailed our ears as we left the drowsy sunshine of Portsmouth Square and stepped into the shadowy brick cañon that is the first of Chinatown's alleys. Coming down this alley was a Chinese wedding-procession, as gay and colorful a spectacle as a Fourth of July parade. Leading the procession were half a dozen Chinese musicians clad in gala attire, each doing his utmost to wring or pound or saw the loudest discordant notes from his instrument. Behind the musicians, laughing, and trying to shout to each other above the din of the music, were two hundred or more friends of the bride's family. Afoot, and alone, behind these guests, strode the bride's mother. Then came the red-decked car in which rode the bride, another car carrying the bride's younger brother, more cars filled with guests; and trailing along behind these, a shouting, yelling troop of Chinese children.

"Where are we going, Mr. Lyons?" asked Chen Wan, raising his voice above the racket.

"I'm going to see old Lee Wang first," shouted Lyons. "He knows everything."

Lee Wang lived in the rooming-house of Chee Lun over the meat-shop of Huie Gop,

which was in Shanghai Alley. As we turned into this alley, I was startled by what I at first mistook for a fusillade of revolver-shots. Then I saw the spreading ring of blue smoke, the column of red and gold suspended from an upper window, the spluttering circle of black flame, and understood. Some one, grateful for something he considered a gift from the gods, or desirous of warding off some misfortune threatened him by the evil spirits, was making an offering of a string of firecrackers. This "string" was smaller than the kind usually used by the Chinese, being only six feet long, a foot or so in diameter, and probably did not cost more than ten dollars. At the bottom of the string, where the fuse had been ignited, perhaps ten feet above the walk, was a continuous flare of flame and smoke as hundreds and hundreds of big firecrackers exploded and rained down on the street. We crossed the street and with difficulty made our way through the throng of men, women and children who poured from the shops and dwellings to clap their hands over the fire-offering, and to yell their good wishes to the man in the window above.

On entering the meat-shop of Huie Gop, we found him in furious argument with a Chinese woman. Other Chinese stood around, laughing, and shouting suggestions first to old Huie, then to the woman.

"You are a thief!" the woman shrilled loudly. "Why should I pay you seven cents when I can buy better sausage from Louie Hip for five cents?"

"Because you are a fool!" roared Huie, and brought his huge cleaver smashing down through a ham-bone. "Only a fool would pay seven cents to argue with me when you can have a better argument for only five cents with Louie Hip—who, since he has very little trade, has more time to listen to noisy old women!"

The crowd was in an uproar of laughter when the stair door closed behind us. For a moment, as we pounded up the creaking steps, we were in darkness; then, of a sudden, we emerged into a well-lighted room, blue with tobacco-smoke. At our entrance, the clatter of voices abruptly stopped.

I remember how the semicircle of Chinese stared at us a moment, hostile suspicion in their dark faces and gleaming in their slant eyes; then, as they recognized us, they broke into smiles and shouts of greeting.

"Hullo, hullo!" cried Chee Lun, wad-



"Where are we going?" asked Chen Wan, raising his voice above the racket.

ding toward us and extending a fat hand. "Long time I no see you, Mist' Lyons! Hullo, Chen Wan! An' Mist' Minturn! Glad see you, gent'men! Can I do something fo' you, uh?"

Detective Lyons did not answer. A look of mild surprise on his face, he was gazing at a group of Chinese around a table in a corner back of the stairway. In the center of the table one of the Chinese had upturned a small jar of dried beans. Now he was counting out the spilled beans in groups of four. Lyons, of course, recognized the game at once as *fan-tan*, a Chinese gambling game sometimes played with small coins. Bets are made as to how many beans, or coins, will be left after the last group of four has been counted out—whether one, or two or three. As the leader counted, the others joined in excitedly: "Yat! yi! sa'am! sz! One! Two! Three! Four!" As they neared the

end, the excitement flamed higher and higher. They gesticulated with both hands, stamped the floor in unison with the counting, and shouted the numbers louder and louder until the uproar was deafening.

"Jus' quiet game *fan-tan*," yelled Chee Lun, and shrugged indifferently. "No play fo' money. You unna'stan'?"

"Sure!" Lyons shouted back at him, smiling. "I understand mebbe more'n you think I do, Chee Lun. But this isn't a gambling raid. I want to see Lee Wang. Is he—"

Before Lyons could finish his sentence, Chee Lun swung around. "*Lee Wang*!" he roared above the clangor of the *fan-tan* players.

"*Lee Wang*!" the nearest Chinese took up the cry.

"Lee Wang! Lee Wang!" others carried it to the farthest end of the room.

Lee Wang, a shriveled old man with a barbaric shock of iron-gray hair topping his broad forehead, and big horn-rimmed glasses perched on his thin, hooked nose, stepped from one of the rear rooms. Seeing Lyons, he waved a hand and smiled.

"I wanted to see him privately," Lyons explained.

"Shuah, shuah!" exclaimed Chee Lun, nodding his head vigorously. Then he raised his voice and barked in Cantonese: "Lee Wang! The official wants to see you in private!"

LEE WANG met us amid the tables crowded with Chinese reading, playing dominoes, chatting and laughing. He shook hands, and cackled an effusive greeting that was none the less sincere. Talking over his shoulder, and bobbing his head, he led us to his room. Keeping up a running fire of small talk, he placed out stools for us, then sat down at his littered writing-desk. Opening a drawer, he got out a box of cigars and passed them around. They were wretched things, we knew; but we also knew better than to decline. Lyons very diplomatically took two, put one in his vest pocket, and with much gusto lighted the other.

For a moment then, no one spoke. Outside in the meeting-room, above the steady drum of talk and laughter, the *jan-tan* players kept up their noisy counting and pounding on the floor. In one of the rear rooms a scratchy phonograph was playing a Chinese record, a strident, ear-splitting thing that has been popular among the Chinese for over two thousand years.

"Long time I no see you, Mist' Lyons!" Lee Wang cackled the familiar phrase as he smacked his lips over his cigar.

"I've been away, Lee."

"Yes? You go far?"

"New York."

"Ah! Why you go New York?"

Lyons told him. Other questions followed. Lyons answered patiently, for he knew that however impertinent they might seem to Occidental ears, Lee Wang was merely taking the Chinese way of showing a polite interest in his guest's welfare.

After a while Detective Lyons got a chance to ask a few questions himself. There was some talk, I remember, about the proposed new hospital for the Chinese, about the new Chinese theater that was

soon to open, and many other things concerning Chinatown. In all of these Detective Lyons showed a remarkable knowledge and a sympathetic interest.

Gradually the talk got around to a recent raid on the Siberian gambling-club. Since Chock Doy was known to have held an interest in that club, it seemed only natural now to mention him by name, and to refer, casually, to his murder.

"Queer nobody knows who done that!" remarked Lyons, apparently interested only in clearing the ash off his cigar.

Lee Wang chuckled lustily. Now he knew why Lyons had come to him! I saw him flash a look at Chen Wan, saw Chen nod quickly.

"Mist' Lyons," said Lee, "don't Cap'n Creave know? He wo'k ha'd. Ask many questions."

Lyons shook his head.

"Lee, Captain Creave sent me up here to ask you. He says you know everything."

"Me?" A ludicrous expression came over Lee Wang's face as he modestly tried to hide his pleasure over the compliment. "Huh! Tha's mistake, Mist' Lyons!"

"Go on, Lee! You know all about it! If there is anything about it you don't know, you know where to dig it up. An' listen, Lee! This means a lot to me. Somebody killed Chock Doy while I was out o' town. I got to show 'em they can't do murder in my district an' get away with it. Chen Wan, here, an' Mr. Minturn—they understand. An' I want you to help me."

Lee Wang flashed another look at Chen Wan, then turned to Lyons. "Did you ask Chee Lun? Mebbeso he can tell you."

Without waiting for Lyons to reply, Lee raised his voice to a shout: "*Chee Lun! Oh, Chee Lun! Lai ni ch'u!* Come here!"

Chee Lun must have been just outside the door, for he was waddling into the room before Lee Wang's weird singsong died away. He rubbed his fat hands together briskly. "Well! Well! Can I do something fo' you, uh?"

Lee Wang waved a bony hand toward the detective. "Mist' Lyons wants know all about misfortune happen honorable Chock Doy. Mebbeso you like tell him?"

"Me? Huh! What can I tell? I know nothing. Why don't you ask Bow Sheong, who worked for Chock Doy? He can tell you."

Again, before Lyons could speak, Lee

Wang raised his voice: "Bow Sheong! Oh, Bow Sheong!"

A skinny individual in loose blouse and pantaloons came slapping into Lee Wang's room. He looked at us and grinned.

"Hullo! Whasamallee? You call me?"

"Mist' Lyons wants know all about what happen your good friend Chock Doy," said Lee Wang.

"Huh!" Bow Sheong grunted explosively. I saw him look hard at Lee Wang

thing would be to ask *who* killed Chock Doy. Lyons, however, had better judgment.

"Well, Lee, supposin' you tell me *why* Chock Doy was killed."

Lee Wang shrugged expressively. The



"Ah Sam kill him because he throw honorable bones in ash can. Tha's why!"

for a breath; then he glanced quickly at Chen Wan.

Chen Wan nodded.

"Tso lol!" barked Lee Wang. Obediently, Bow Sheong and Chee Lun sat down.

"Mist' Lyons," said Lee Wang, "Cap'n Creave ver' fine man. You unna'stan'? But you—well, you savvy Chinaman mo' bettah. If we tell Cap'n Creave eba't'ing, he no unna'stan'. But you—well, we know you, an' we know Mist' Minturn, an' we know Chen Wan. We glad tell you eba't'ing. So now you ask questions. Wha' you want know, Mist' Lyons?"

Detective Lyons hesitated. The natural

impression I got was that he considered the answer to that question both very simple and very difficult.

"Mist' Lyons, you know Chock Doy run gambling-house. Tha's all right. Eba'body knows not wrong to gamble. But Chock Doy crooked gambler. Tha's ver' wrong. Also he kip slave-girls. Tha's not bad like cheating at *fan-tan*, but gib Chinaman bad name. Well, eba'body say—sometime somebody kill Chock Doy. See? Mebbe honest gambler kill him. Mebbe slave-girl kill him. Mebbe *tong*-man kill him. Lo's people want kill Chock Doy hip damn' bad. Chock Doy jus' laugh.

"But,"—Lee Wang sighed and reached

for his pipe,—“one day he laugh too much.”

At that, Bow Sheong and Chee Lun chuckled heartily. Lee Wang stuffed the tiny silver bowl of his long-stemmed pipe, and lighted it. After a few spluttering puffs, he laid the pipe aside.

“Now, there was man in Marysville named Chim Ton. Chim Ton was good man but ver’ poor. He die ’bout five years ago, an’—”

“Seven years ago!” blurted Bow Sheong. “I was—”

“It wasn’t more than six years!” interrupted Chee Lun.

“It was seven!” declared Bow Sheong. “Don’t I—”

“But his boy, Ah Sam, told me—”

“Aw, whasamallee, you?” shouted Lee Wang. “Mist’ Lyons, mebbe five, mebbe six, mebbe seven years ago, Chim Ton die. He leave boy an’ girl. The boy was twelve years old. The girl was—”

“The boy was at least thirteen!” Chee Lun broke in.

“He was no more than eleven!” cried Bow Sheong. “Don’t I—”

“But Ah Sam told me himself—”

“Aw, whasamallee, you!” shouted Lee Wang, waving his hands indignantly. “Mist’ Lyons, the boy was mebbe eleven, mebbe twelve, mebbe thirteen years old. The girl was two years younger—”

“Tha’s right,” agreed Chee Lun.

“Yes,” said Bow Sheong with evident reluctance, “tha’s right.”

“She was ver’ pretty girl, Mist’ Lyons,” went on Lee Wang. “Ver’ pretty. You unna’stan?”

LYONS nodded patiently. Lee Wang spluttered over his pipe a thoughtful moment, then again laid it aside. He leaned over the desk and spoke with sober and positive emphasis:

“Mist’ Lyons, when good Chinaman die, he like be taken back to old home in China to be buried. No like be buried in foreign-devil cemetery. Like be buried in place where lay his father’s bones, an’ his father’s father, an’ all his male ancestors for mebbe thousand years. So Chim Ton, he tell his boy an’ girl to promise him they will wo’k an’ earn money an’ have his coffin dug up from foreign-devil cemetery in Marysville an’ ship back to old home in China. Now, Mist’ Lyons, Chim Ton he tell his boy an’ girl that when he know pretty soon die, when he can jus’ talk one

wo’d at a time. An’ the boy an’ girl, they get down on their knees an’ they make solemn oath to do what their honorable father ask.

“Then”—again Lee Wang reached for his pipe—“Chim Ton turn face to wall an’ make die hip damn’ quick.”

Again Chee Lun and Bow Sheong chuckled heartily. There was an interruption as some one came to the door and in Cantonese demanded to know if Man Chat was in. Chee Lun said he was. Bow Sheong contradicted that quickly and stated that Man Chat had gone to the Customhouse. Whereupon Lee Wang declared that Man Chat had told him he was going to attend the wedding. Which called for further talk concerning the wedding, how long it would last, and so forth.

I remember it was at least ten minutes before Lee Wang was back to his story.

“Right away after their father die,” he said, “the boy, Ah Sam, and the girl, Ah Lin, come to San Francisco an’ try to get wo’k. They hunt all over; no can find wo’k. Pretty soon all money gone. They try harder. They tell eba’body what they promise their honorable father. Eba’body sorry. Some people gib them little money. But nobody got any wo’k fo’ them; an’ so one day they go to Chock Doy an’—”

“No,” interrupted Bow Sheong, “Chock Doy went to them. Don’t I know?”

“But they went to him first!” cried Chee Lun. “Ah Sam told me—”

“Aw, shut up!” roared Lee Wang. “You let me talk! Mist’ Lyons, Chock Doy hear sad story this boy an’ his sister. He tell them he ver’ sorry. Chock Doy hip damn’ liar, but Ah Sam don’t know it. Chock Doy neba sorry fo’ anybody. See? Well, Chock Doy tell boy he like help them. He look at boy an’ say: ‘Too bad, but I will help you!’ But to himself Chock Doy say: ‘That boy hip damn’ strong fo’ hard wo’k!’ See? Then Chock Doy look at girl an’ say: ‘Don’t cry any more; I gib you good home an’ plenty money!’ But to himself Chock Doy say: ‘Haie! That girl hip damn’ pretty alla same peach!’ Savvy?”

Lyons nodded.

“Then what you think?” shouted Lee Wang with sudden fury. “That jackal Chock Doy, he tell boy an’ girl to come his house an’ he say he gib them plenty clothes an’ rice an’ good beds an’ money fo’ send their father’s honorable bones back to China; an’ when they ask him how long befo’ he gib them money fo’ that, he say:

'Oh, bimeby; you wait!' An' Ah Sam an' Ah Lin they so happy they get down on knees to Chock Doy an' cry. *T-s-ss!*" Lee Wang spat disgustedly.

"But they not happy fo' long!" cried Bow Sheong. "Don't I know? Didn't I wo'k fo' Chock Doy? Many, many times I see that little boy scrub dirty floors, wash lo's dishes, cook, run errands, clean fish, pick bamboo sprouts, wash dirty clothes, make beds, clean rooms, sweep halls an' stairs, an' then stay up late at night to clean filthy spittoons. Chock Doy make him do eba't'ing, an' treat him like dog. Make him wear old clothes an' gib him nothing to eat but scraps from table. Lo's time I see that boy so tired he fall asleep on stairs with scrub-brush in his hand. Then Chock Doy yell at him an' curse him an' kick him so he bleed an' can't get up. An' when boy ask when Chock Doy will gib money fo' send father's honorable bones back to China, Chock Doy jus' laugh an' say: 'Oh, bimeby; you wait!'"

"An' he waited fo' long years!" shouted Chee Lun angrily.

"*Haie!* He waited six years!" barked Lee Wang.

"You're both wrong!" cried Bow Sheong. "Chock Doy make that boy wait five years! Don't I know? Didn't I—"

"Aw, whasamallee?" Lee Wang broke in. "Mist' Lyons, Chock Doy make Ah Sam wo'k like slave fo' six long years. He gib him jus' rags fo' clothes, jus' moldy rice fo' eat, an' whip him all time. Boy jus' cry an' think of his promise to honorable father an' say to himself: 'Mebbe bimeby Chock Doy kip his promise.'"

"But the girl!" spoke up Detective Lyons abruptly. "What happened to her?"

The three Chinese fell silent.

"She was ver' pretty," said Lee Wang, looking at his pipe.

I SAW Lyons' face harden. "Go on!" he rapped out, his big, blunt fingers thrumming nervously on the desk.

"Yes, girl ver' pretty," spoke up Bow Sheong; "but long time Chock Doy make her wo'k like slave too. Lo's time I see that little girl standing on stool washing big stack dishes. I see her scrubbing floors, carrying water and coal. Chock Doy neba let her play with other girls, neba let her go school; an' lo's time I see him beat her with bamboo stick. When girl ask him when he kip his promise to send her honorable father's bones back to

China, he look at her an' his eyes get bright like snake's, an' he say: 'Not long now! Not long! An' girl she think he mean not long now he kip his promise; but Chock Doy he think how fast girl grow up an' he—he mean something else.'"

"Chock Doy was a devil!" barked Lee Wang in furious Cantonese. "*May his wicked bones be eaten by filthy worms!*"

"*Tsau kom lok!*" shouted Chee Lun and Bow Sheong together. "Let it be so!"

Lyons flung me a questioning look; so while Lee Wang spluttered over his pipe, I put that ancient Chinese curse into English, explaining that the destruction of Chock Doy's bones would not only disturb the rest of Chock Doy himself, but would bring misfortune upon all his descendants forever. There was in my mind no thought whatever of ridiculing that queer but deep-seated Chinese belief; yet something gave Lyons that impression, for he glared at me savagely. "Well, it aint any worse than some o' the stuff we preach!" he flung at me. "An' besides, if you believe it, it's true, aint it?"

"Four hundred million Chinese believe it," I replied. "You misunderstood me, Mr. Lyons. I was not speaking slightly of that belief."

"There is an old, old Chinese saying that sums up the whole thing," spoke up Chen Wan. "It goes like this: '*The most important thing in life is to be well buried.*' When you have heard the whole story of what happened to Chock Doy, I wish you would recall that Chinese proverb, Mr. Lyons."

Lyons nodded, and turned impatiently to Lee Wang. "Go on, Lee!"

Again Lee Wang shrugged. "Well, not much more to tell, Mist' Lyons. One day Chock Doy call Ah Sam an' tell him make ready fo' go Marysville to get his father's coffin. Ah Sam ver' happy. He tell Ah Lin pretty soon now they wont hab wo'k fo' Chock Doy no more, an' girl she so happy she cry.

"But when Ah Sam come back—his sister gone.

"Ah Sam ask Chock Doy where she is, an' he say he don't know. Ah Sam ask eba'b'ody, an' they jus' shake head an' say: 'Too bad!'

"Ah Sam hip damn' scared, but he can do nothing until he get all through shipping honorable father's bones. Chock Doy pay fo' bringing coffin from Marysville, but now he say he wont pay fo' ship to

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China because girl run away. So Ah Sam take father's coffin to his own room in Chock Doy's house.

"Next day Chock Doy tell Ah Sam ship coffin quick. He say he no like hab in house. Bring bad luck. Ah Sam hip glad an' say he ship right away quick in morning.

"That night Ah Sam take good luck money to put in coffin with father's bones so will hab safe journey. He open coffin an'—*haie!* There his sister—dead."

"Dead?" echoed Lyons.

Lee Wang nodded.

"Chock Doy—killed her?"

Again Lee Wang nodded. "She ver' pretty girl," he said, looking at his pipe.

For a moment, then, no one spoke. I remember becoming conscious again of the noisy counting of the *fan-tan* players, the raucous scratching of the phonograph.

"So that's it!" muttered Detective Lyons, his blunt fingers drumming angrily on the desk. "Ah Sam killed Chock Doy because Chock Doy had murdered the boy's sister. I—"

"No, no!" shouted Bow Sheong and Chee Lun. "Not fo' that. He—"

"Aw, whasamallee, you?" barked Lee Wang. "Mist' Mr. Lyons, Chock Doy kill girl. Tha's bad. But Ah Sam no kill him fo' that. No, no!"

"Then why'd he do it?" demanded Lyons.

"Why?" shouted Lee Wang angrily. "I tell you why. Ah Sam kill him with hip sharp cleaver because he take honorable bones out of coffin an' throw in ash can. Tha's why!"

A sharp crash of cymbals, the shuddering scream of flageolets, assaulted our ears as we turned into Shanghai Alley. When I saw the gayly robed musicians sawing and pounding and blasting the utmost discord from their queer instruments I thought it was the wedding-procession returning; but when the musicians had passed and I saw the hired mourners and heard their high-pitched wailing, I knew then it was the usual funeral march of the Chinese and I was glad when we had left them behind and emerged into the quiet sunshine of Portsmouth Square.

"Well?" Captain Creave flung over his shoulder as we trailed into his office. "What did you three wise guys get out of those Chinks?"

"Not a thing," said Lyons. "They wont talk."

Senónaqua and the Lion

By BIGELOW NEAL

A fascinating story of wilderness life, by the gifted author of "Captain Jack," "The Field of Amber Gold" "The Cloud King" and other well-liked stories.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

JUST before its junction with the Missouri, Clear Creek shows what appears to be a strange timidity. Instead of boldly approaching the river, the smaller stream turns and parallels the great, sand-laden flood for some little distance.

The result is a triangular piece of land between the waters, its base marked by a wall of cottonwoods; its apex a sandy, wind-swept area of stunted, ice-battered sand willows.

It was night. The yellow disk of a full moon hung just above the highest branches of the cottonwoods. The wild folk of the day lay snug and deep in the ground or roosted high among the shimmering boughs while their places amid the underbrush had been taken by those animals and birds that move only under cover of darkness. At that point where the wall of cottonwoods falls away and gives place to the thicket of sand willows, a beaver dam stretched across the creek, holding the waters and forming a long, deep pond on its upstream side. Scattered at intervals along the crest of the dam were the ever-busy people who built it. They were working now on a new mud-cap, something unnecessary except from an artistic standpoint, for it was well above the water-line and served only



The old beaver became as rigid as though cast in stone.

to give the dam an appearance of finish and neatness.

As the moon swung above the timber, its golden light flooded the pond and sparkled on the silvery sheet of water that tumbled and gurgled from the spillway. Fish began to move about the pond, pushing the water above them into half-defined waves, and from out in the timber came the sound of pattering cottontails. Strange forms moved, too, across the lacelike patterns of moonlight and shadow: bobcats, on errands of destruction; skunks, minding their own business and advising their neighbors to do the same; and near one end of the dam, an old beaver, the hero of this story.

Senónaqua, "*Brother of Whom,*" came by his name from the language of the Arickrah. Because his intelligence was greater than the intelligence of any other animal known to the Indians, the beaver had been called by a name which describes him as almost human, and Senónaqua lived up to his reputation. He was old and wise in the ways of the wild; and now, as he sat on the end of the dam, chattering and thumping directions to the members of his colony, he bore himself with the air of a field marshal on parade. He sat up very straight braced by his hind legs and the broad, flat paddle of his tail; his sharp, brown eyes missed nothing of the scene before him; his sensitive ears recorded even the slightest note from the forest behind; his broad, humorous nose constantly sifted the scents traveling on the night air.

Senónaqua was the chief engineer of the beaver colony. It was his wise head that planned and directed the building of the dam, that directed the building of the winter feed-bed, showing the younger beavers how to cut trees and how to stick the ends of the branches into the mud at the bottom of the pond, that their tender bark might be still accessible when the frost king had sheathed the pond in cold blue ice; lastly, it was Senónaqua that stood guard when danger threatened.

But now Senónaqua was worried. Something in the air that filtered through his nostrils struck a false note. He turned to face the timber, but he searched the shadows in vain. He lifted his ears, that they might record every sound of the night, but he heard nothing that should cause him fear and yet he felt that something was wrong, that from some source danger threatened. He could neither see it, nor could he hear it, but the nerves which connected with his sense of smell twanged a warning, and the old beaver became as rigid as though cast in stone.

Suddenly a silence fell over the timber. A turtle-dove cooing from the branches of a box elder cut short his plaintive note and stared down into the underbrush; a prairie chicken, talking to herself in the boughs of a slender ash, stood up and half opened her wings as though for flight; rabbits scurried about among the underbrush; and a mink, eating a fish on the shore, dived and disappeared in the blue-green depths of the pond. Senónaqua opened and closed his mouth in rapid succession, bringing his

teeth together in a harsh chattering sound timed like the ticking of a telegraph key. Evidently he spoke in code, too, for the busy members of his colony took to the water, and nothing marked their departure save a series of circular waves running out and out, to die away in the distance or lap themselves to quiet, on tiny beaches along the shore.

NOW nothing moved. Not a sign of life from the water; not a sound from the timber; but the old beaver knew that somewhere in the shadows a menace of death hung over the wild folk. The inquisitive wrinkling of his nose gave way to a look of puzzlement, and as always in such cases, Senónaqua began to scratch his belly with great industry. Trappers will tell you that a beaver scratches himself to start the oil which makes his undercoat of fur waterproof, but Senónaqua, this time, was scratching because that was the way he got most of his ideas, and now he needed one, for he was facing an unknown danger.

Minutes passed in lifeless silence, and then Senónaqua detected the faintest suggestion of a movement from the shadow of a fallen tree. Minutes passed again, and this time he saw something that moved like a great tawny snake, and he caught the flicker of light from glaring yellow eyes. And now it was out in the moonlight, and the beaver was looking at the menacing form of a cougar—a puma or a mountain lion, as you choose to call it.

Here, then, they were face to face. The biggest cat in North America, and to the beaver the most dangerous beast of all. Pitted against her mighty, spring-steel muscles and murderous claws was only a chubby, awkward animal, little more than twice the size of a football. At first glance, it would seem that the odds were all in favor of the cat, but victory among the wild people, as among men, goes oftener than not to the possessor of brains which are trained to do the right thing at the right time. The big cat had brawn and rending power to burn, but she was capable of only about two ideas a year, while the beaver's brain was a regular dynamo of activity. He could think twice while the big cat batted an eye, and although he appeared awkward and helpless, he had strength out of all proportion to his size, and like so many of the waterpeople, he was as quick as greased lightning whenever the occasion required.

Slowly, inch by inch, the lion moved forward. Seemingly she made no effort. The only visible motion was the constant, pendulumlike swing of her tail, but she was moving, nevertheless, and soon was within striking distance of the beaver. Senónaqua saw and knew what was coming, but his scratching was producing results. He knew something about cats too, and he had dug up at least one idea suited to the occasion. He might have been under six feet of water, safe and sound, but he wasn't; and what was worse than that, he had, apparently, lost interest in the cat, for his mild brown eyes were fixed on an imaginary object high in the sky. . . . Then she came, a long, curving streak of yellow fury. She struck on the dam with a snarl of triumph, and her lancetlike claws ripped through—mud and wood, but nothing more. The place where Senónaqua had been was vacant.

OF all the things which a cat detests, cold water ranks first. Internally they make use of it as a drink, but externally it is a thing they abhor. A drop of water in a cat's ear will cause more trouble than a bee in a small boy's trousers. Senónaqua knew from his experience with wild-cats and lynxes that this was a fact. The lion knew it when about a third of a barrel struck her full in the face. Her knowledge became a certainty when another deluge from the powerful tail of the beaver followed the first. The third deluge caught her in the side, and the fourth missed her by a narrow margin as she sprang for safety up and into the underbrush. Crouching there in savage fury, she glared back at the hated dam, back at the scene of her humiliation, back at the unconcerned form of the old beaver sitting bolt upright, exactly where she had seen him first. Apparently Senónaqua had never moved. Apparently he had never stopped his eternal scratching.

Round Number One had, undeniably, gone to Senónaqua. The first encounter between wit and brawn had resulted in victory for the superior intelligence of the beaver, but the end was not yet come. Senónaqua knew that thenceforth there would be no safety for his colony. Sometime the lion would come again, and it might be at a time when, protected by a mantle of darkness and perhaps by the whining of wind among the cottonwoods, she would crawl close enough to strike



With a snarl of rage and disappointment, the lion rushed in pursuit.

—without warning. That would mean death among the busy ranks of the beavers.

For many nights Senónaqua held his colony close to the water. It was no longer safe to follow their paths far back into the timber in search of the tenderest branches, for once caught away from the stream, they would be all but helpless. Nor could they sport on their mud slides along the shore as of old, for play meant forgetfulness, and forgetfulness meant death. Last and worst of all, it was growing late in the season. Very soon they must cut and carry the small trees for their underwater feed-beds. Should the lion remain in the neighborhood until ice formed on the creek, the beavers' would face a winter of starvation. The worries of Senónaqua were many.

For weeks the beavers lived in constant fear of the great tawny cat whose presence sent a shiver of dread among all the wild folk. Sometimes they saw a threatening shadow moving in ghostly silence among the underbrush, and sometimes the sharp ears of Senónaqua's band detected the almost soundless footfalls of padded feet. Never were they free from the danger of sudden attack; never did they dare go far from the safety of deep water. Always

the sounds and shifting shadows of darkness spoke to them of danger and perhaps of death to one of their number.

AT last came a night in early fall when once again the timber was flooded with yellow rays of a full moon. Trusting to the aid of the moonlit forest, Senónaqua scattered his band at work farther back than usual from the shores of the pond, while he, in his capacity as guard and protector, went on still farther and posted himself, silent and motionless, on the top of a stump.

It was one of those nights when intermittent currents of air caused rasping murmurs of protest among the frost-touched boughs of the cottonwoods and the movements of rabbit and deer sounded harshly on the crackling leaves below.

The moon climbed slowly up the eastern slope, seemed poised for a moment at the zenith, and then swung down toward the west.

For hours past, the old beaver had not moved other than to turn his head and sniff at the air, or raise his ears as he sought, among the sounds that came to him, for a hint of danger. And then it came—the faintest suggestion of a false

note on the air-lines of the night. It seemed to come from a spot between him and the creek and was, consequently, nearer to the working beavers than to himself. Quickly it came again, and this time he recognized the soft *swish-swish* of the lashing tail. A new sound rang through the aisles of the trees: the triple thump of Senónaqua's tail on the sun-dried wood of the stump. For a moment there was silence, and then a series of far-away splashes told the old beaver that the members of his colony had found safety in the pond. They had heard the warning and were safe; but what of the old leader, cut off from the creek and alone in the underbrush?

Senónaqua was halfway across the base of the triangle formed by the river and creek. All night he had been listening to the low moan of the rushing Missouri, and now it suggested his only avenue of escape. Could he reach and cross the wide sandbar ahead of the lion, all would be well, but he knew she could travel many times faster than he, and it looked like a forlorn hope. It was, however, his only chance, and dropping from the stump, he started for the river.

Senónaqua was not at his best on dry land. His gracefulness in the water was unquestioned, but on shore he moved in an awkward waddle. Now, however, he waddled as he had never waddled before, and as yet no sound had come from behind. At the edge of the timber he came to open sand, but there was still far to go, and that in moonlight, where his form would be visible to the dullest vision. When a little more than halfway across the sandbar, he heard a savage snarl, and glancing back, saw the lion break from the timber and advance swiftly across the open. She was gaining rapidly, and the old beaver realized the impossibility of reaching the river ahead of her. With this realization he wheeled in his tracks, and the shrill, defiant chatter of his teeth rang across the bar. He began scratching himself.

WHEN within easy leaping distance, the great cat checked her speed and crouched for a spring. Had she kept on, the beaver would doubtless have died where he stood, but she was too sure of herself and could not resist the temptation to play with her victim, as all cats will when they know they hold the power of life and death. In that instant of delay was lost her one hope of a kill.

Although Senónaqua was far beyond reach of the cat, he suddenly broke off his scratching and pivoted on his hind feet, making a complete revolution almost quicker than the eye could see. In turning, his tail struck the sand with astounding force, and a shower of the sharp, stinging grains struck full in the face of the cat. Surprised and partly blinded, the lion hesitated again, and when she opened her eyes the beaver was sitting on the farther end of a half-floating drift-log which thrust its fanlike stump and roots far into the river.

With a snarl of rage and disappointment, the lion rushed in pursuit. Across the sand; up on to the log and out along its teetering length, she sprang, too angry to fear even the water. An instant before she came within reach of him, the agile Senónaqua dropped over the stump and into the river.

A sudden lunge of her saber-like claws netted the lion nothing but a wet foot, and crouching again, she gave vent to her wrath in spitting hisses directed at the rushing torrent beneath. Once she saw him, but he was beyond reach, and she waited in calculating cruelty for a time when the beaver might venture again within reach of her claws. It was a dangerous game for her; for had she known, the log was even then obeying the gentle lift of rising waters.

FOR a long time she waited and saw nothing. One reason was that there was nothing to see, for it would have taken sharp eyes, indeed to penetrate the sand-laden waters and see a dark shadow working back toward the shore and toward the point where the log rested upon the sand. Once she felt a gentle tug, as though something was lifting and pushing against the log. Again it came, and then once more, but still the eyes of the cat were fixed on the spot where the beaver had gone down. Suddenly the log began to revolve. The lion scrambled madly to retain her foothold; then turning, she saw a moonlit sandbar and an old beaver busily scratching himself as he watched the fifty feet of ever-widening water between them. . . .

Miles below, where the channel swept the other shore, the lioness might land again. At any rate, never again would her presence trouble the beavers at Clear Creek, for Senónaqua had won the last round.

*"Different hat
and dress—but
the same face!"*



The Ward of the Ship

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

This, one of the most attractive of all these "Tales of the Merchant Marine," takes you on an exciting voyage to strange events in South America.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

THE big *Argentine Liberator* was easily the most attractive steamer berthed at any of the Bush Terminal piers. Two young women who came down to the gangplank in a taxi—otherwise loaded with steamer-trunks and an older lady, evidently the mother of one—were very much impressed with the boat's appearance—her spotless decks, cabin woodwork and up-to-date stateroom fittings. They also took in several eyefuls of one handsome young officer in summer whites on the pier by the gangway, and another leaning over the end of the bridge. It seemed to them that the voyage to South America was likely to be unusually pleasant.

In half an hour a deep bellow from the siren warned the older woman ashore with various other friends and relatives. Then, as the girls leaned over the rail of the boat-deck to wave good-bys and watch the proceedings, the big hull backed slowly out into the channel and turned her nose toward the Narrows. By the time the lunch-bugle sounded they were outside the

Hook—half of the saloon-list deciding that they really were not hungry at all, and that the air was much better on deck. Off Long Branch, they weren't even interested in the air. The two girls, however, were better sailors—enjoying their tiffin and wondering why the handsome mate at the head of the other table was stealing so many glances in their direction. There happened to be a reason, which they found out later with a good deal of pleased surprise. When Captain Connynsby stepped aboard just before sailing time, he had a package of last-minute mail which he had fetched down from the Company's office—and had handed Ned Coffin a London letter addressed in writing which seemed familiar. When Coffin went below before tiffin, he sat down in his room to read this at his leisure.

LLOYD'S,
London.

My dear Coffin,

If you get cargo for South America, which I understand is already fixed, my niece-by-marriage, Katharine Lee, intends booking with you as far as Rio and possibly far-

ther, with a traveling companion—one of her girl-friends. She goes to Rio in response to a letter from a firm of English solicitors down there who have handled all the legal affairs of her father's brother, who they say died recently, or was killed—a coffee and sugar planter supposed to be worth a very considerable sum.

In a will executed five years ago, he left the bulk of this to Kate, his favorite, in fact his only, niece—also insurance with us in her favor amounting to fifteen thousand pounds. I wrote the policy—the premiums were fully paid up when he died.

I now understand from Katharine that a later will was found in the desk before which his body was sitting, leaving practically everything except small bequests to a natural son by a Brazilian woman—who claims that Harry Lee recognized him as his son and heir before witnesses. Fulham & Pennington say they have a strong suspicion that this later will is a forgery and the young fellow merely a sort of protégé in whom Lee took a passing interest, the young chap having been overseer upon one of his plantations.

In any event, however, we shall pay no attention to this will as having any bearing upon our policy, which distinctly names Katharine Lee as the beneficiary—and we will pay her the money upon presentation of the policy. If this has been stolen, as is quite possible, we'll pay it anyhow upon duly attested proof of Lee's death—taking the ground that he was obliged to notify us if he wished to substitute another beneficiary—which of course he never did.

Now—I come to the favor I'd like to ask of you—if you can take the time from your duties and recreation in Rio. I fancy the solicitors are absolutely reliable and in position to look after these two girls while they are in the city—but if you can make sure of that, I will be somewhat easier in mind. Rio isn't New York. If you have time to dig up any facts bearing on the case, which would help Katharine, I shall very much appreciate it—but please do not spend all your leisure hours in that way. Thanking you in advance—and with kind regards.

Your sincere friend,

PHILIP FERNSHAW.

Senior Carlton Club

IT was in the minds of Miss Lee and her friend Marjorie Banton to find some pretext for making the acquaintance of the handsome mate and two other officers who seemed obviously well-bred—so that when they were in their chairs on the boat-deck, an hour after tiffin, they were delighted to see him approaching them with a smile and a canvas stool.

"Now—which of you is Miss Lee—and which Miss Banton?"—studying their faces in a respectful but friendly way.

The girls exchanged a glance or two which plainly said: "Let's fool him!"

"I'm Marjorie Banton," said Katharine, "and this lady is Katharine Lee."

"No good! I'm Ned Coffin—three-striper, this trip. You can fool me on almost anything you feel like trying—but you see, I knew which was which before I started this—saw Tommy Swain's seating-diagram for the Captain's table. I'd let you carry the joke as far as you please, Miss Lee—but I have a letter from your Uncle Philip asking me to look out for you girls in any way I can. Considering your object in going to Rio, it might lead to serious complications if you let me get twisted up on your identities. Catch the point—don't you?"

"Why—yes—if I understand you at all! You say you've heard from my Uncle Philip? What Uncle Philip have you in mind?"

"Fernshaw—Lloyd's—London. One of my warmest friends. Sailed the entire round-trip with us, last voyage. You must have read the newspaper reports of that voyage? It wasn't what we considered a dull one."

"Oh-h-h—are *you* the Mr. Coffin who did all those perfectly wonderful things—got all those medals and rewards?"

Coffin frowned.

"I'm just the mate who was your uncle's friend—and wish to serve you in any way I can. Forget the rest of it, or I'll get sore! Now—in his letter, he gave me a general idea of the situation in Rio. If you care about explaining more or discussing what you have in mind to do, I'll be glad to make any suggestions which occur to me. (I'm keeping an eye out for anyone coming within hearing.) If you don't—why, just put up a howl when you think I might help, and let it go at that."

She studied his face a few seconds in silence.

"Would you be willing to let me see that letter?"

"The last few lines and the signature—of course!" He took it from an inside pocket of his tunic. "But there are some things in it which even you may not know just yet—better not read them until I know just how much of the situation you're familiar with."

EVERY word of the letter was fresh in Coffin's mind. The more he thought of the situation Fernshaw had described, the more it seemed to him that both of

the girls might be in considerable danger even before they reached Rio. When Katharine handed back her uncle's communication after assuring herself that nobody else could have written it, she said:

"I can see that Uncle Phil thinks you're a pretty good friend to have, Mr. Coffin—and I'll be much pleased to have you offer any suggestion which seems advisable.

"Of course Marjorie isn't mixed up in this matter of my Uncle Harry's property at all—but a stranger, not knowing that, might easily include her in anything unpleasant which was planned for me—"

"That's a point I was just about to mention. If she sticks with you wherever you go, she'll run whatever risks there may be—no question about it. And that suggests a measure of precaution which, in your position, I think I would adopt—if it's not too late. You've been aboard a little over four hours. In that time, how many persons have been introduced to you—to how many have you definitely mentioned your names?"

"Why—I don't remember—that we mentioned them to anybody! Let me think— When we came aboard, the taxi-chauffeur gave our trunks to one of the room-stewards—I looked at our ticket and read him the number of our stateroom—and he stowed the luggage in it. No names were mentioned at all. When we went below for tiffin, the chief steward, who seems also to be the purser, seated us at the Captain's table. He may have noticed the room we came out of and had the seats listed to go with that room—or the other women may have been all accounted for before we appeared. I remember saying to Marjorie that the women seemed better sailors than the men, this trip."

"DID Captain Connyngsby address either of you by name?" asked Coffin thoughtfully.

"No. I think he was enough in doubt to dodge around mentioning names at all. Of course he'll get them—from the saloon-list—"

"Swain has 'em on the list all right. But that's no proof that either of you is on that list—if you don't want to be. See here, Miss Lee! From your Uncle's letter, I infer that the Lee estate in Rio is worth at least a million—possibly more. Whether that last will is a forgery or not, the Brazilian claimant is going to probate it just

as soon as he considers it safe to do so, and have some Brazilian executor appointed who will place every possible difficulty in the way of your making investigations. While you are alive and disposed to contest it, with the active assistance of Fulham & Pennington, I don't think he'll attempt probating—too much chance of something underhanded being discovered. I think he may have gotten considerable money and negotiable securities in Mr. Lee's house before reporting his death to the solicitors, so that he's in possession of funds to fight you any way he decides upon. If you die suddenly—that removes pretty much all the active opposition, I infer. Your mother wouldn't fight it—you have no children—probably no heirs near enough to go down there and object. Fulham & Pennington would have no object beyond the academic suspicion of foul play somewhere—they might contest on that ground, but it would mean a lot of trouble and expense to them which they might not get back.

"Now—do you see the point? Here's a young Brazilian adventurer, presumably unscrupulous, with a million dollars or more to gain by your death, and plenty of money to run you down. Isn't it pretty good dope for you to go to Swain—not mentioning me in any way—and tell him you've seen a saloon-list upon which your names do not appear, probably because you happened to get the only available stateroom yesterday, at the Company's office, just after it had been turned in and transportation canceled by two young ladies who had booked to Rio—Miss Lee and Miss Banton? Say that your names are Miss Lemartine and Miss Bartlett—got to correspond with the initials on your luggage, you know—and that the booking-clerk must have got them twisted when the list was printed or when it was too late to change it. If you stick to that with perfectly straight faces, Swain must accept the statement—can't do anything else. He'll put the Captain and the other officers wise. Jack Fowler, our second, is the radio-man. I believe him to be absolutely trustworthy—sufficiently so to show him Fernshaw's signature and confidently describe the main points of the situation. So if any message is relayed for you, he'll quietly let you see it. If it seems all right, you can act upon it. If it looks suspicious to you, he simply returns it with the endorsement: 'No such person on board.'

Did you cable the solicitors that you were coming?"

Katharine assented.

"Yes—but in purposely ambiguous wording. I merely said: 'Have decided to adopt your suggestion—leaving New York this week.'"

"Good! That's bully! We were the only boat clearing for Rio, via Barbados for coal—but there'll be a Royal Mailer and a Lamport and Holt boat within a few days—near enough so that it might be either of them. What do you think about changing your names?"

"Why, as you describe the situation, Mr. Coffin,—and there's no question as to your being right about it,—it may be the means of saving our lives, I think! We'll go to the purser at once!"

"You'll have to be mighty careful about slips. Call each other by the same first names—that ought to be fairly safe—but don't let anyone else do it, or even know them, if you can help it. If you have books or any other articles with your names on them, keep everything of the sort locked in your trunks. Keep practicing with the new names when you are alone with each other—practice not to start or turn about at the sound of the old names."

The girls eagerly agreed to Ned's idea.

HAD conditions on board been as they were when the boat returned to London after her last voyage, Coffin would have gone to Captain Connyngsby at once and given him the main points of the situation—the whole staff of officers would have done everything in their power to assist any relative of Mr. Fernshaw, who had been very well liked. From the master down, the *Argentine's* officers were an exceptionally fine lot who had been through enough serious trouble together to be an unusually friendly team. But an experiment of Sir Jason Brock's—majority shareholder in the line—had completely demoralized the whole staff on the run across to Baltimore. Having in mind the idea of finding out just how dependable each man of them was in considering him for promotion, later on, Sir Jason had given complimentary transportation to a handsome widow who had left a trail of trouble behind her from India to various country-houses in England—the sort of woman who flirts with anything in trousers and enjoys the game of setting one man against another just to see what they'll do. In this

experiment of the owner's Coffin had come through very creditably—also his friend Dr. Thayer and Chief Engineer McTavish—but the others, not so well. Before long, of course, the jealousies and hard feelings which this trouble-maker had stirred up would be forgotten—they were a mighty decent lot at heart, but Coffin felt that just then the Captain might be inclined to make light of any possible danger on board for the two girls.

During the next day, Coffin found that Marjorie had held for the last five years an executive position with a large engineering firm calling for exceptional tact and ability in handling men of widely varying types—her value being indicated by the fact that she worked with merely nominal time off as long as she could stand the pressure and then took whatever time she thought she needed to rest up. Out of a six-thousand-dollar salary she had saved enough to go and come as she pleased, so that Miss Lee couldn't have picked a better traveling companion for the sort of trip she was making. Katharine herself had been a business woman, much to her uncle's admiration—though he had offered an allowance large enough to support the girl and her mother. Ordinarily she was abundantly able to take care of herself in almost any situation, though not as thoroughly efficient or quite as quick-witted as her friend. Coffin saw that, as "Miss Lemartine," Miss Lee was making a hit with his brother officers and most of the passengers. If she succeeded in getting her legacy, she never would lack for attention in any strata of society. He didn't realize the size of the hit he had made with her until the pseudo "Miss Bartlett" dropped a hint one evening on the moonlit boat-deck, where they were having a thoroughly enjoyable tête-à-tête in a secluded corner, aft.

"Do you know, Mr. Coffin, I think you've rather neglected Katharine, the last day or so—I'm afraid she rather feels it. Her uncle's letter practically put her in your charge, you know—"

"That's one reason why I'm not rushing her. If I seem to be monopolizing the girl, it'll get some of the passengers sore. If I seem to have no more interest in Miss Lemartine than the other officers, it gives me a chance to keep a weather eye out for trouble from any direction—if anything happens, I'll get better coöperation from the other chaps."

"You really do anticipate any danger for Katharine before we get to Rio, then?" asked Marjorie anxiously.

"Probably. If that Brazilian's bean works anything like mine, he'll have come to New York, looking her up—tried to intercept letters or messages from her solicitors. Know how to use a gun?"

As he couldn't let this go out of his hands to anyone except the addressee, she copied it on the back of a letter and went to hunt up Coffin. When he had read it, one outstanding fact branded it as a fake.

"Fulham and Pennington don't know you're on this boat! They don't know what boat you may have taken! And



The scoundrel staggered back through the opening.

"Yes. I managed to get the last six months of the war in the Red Cross, in spite of my tender years at the time."

"Got one?"

"Automatic—thirty-two. Light caliber—but I know where to stop a man with it."

"Might be just as well to carry it around with you—where it can be gotten at, instantly. Seems ridiculously melodramatic—I may be making mountains out of road-dust—but I've always figured that it's better to be safe than sorry."

It was on the day after this conversation that Fowler got a radio-message, relayed from the cable-station at Barbados—and found an opportunity for letting "Miss Lemartine" see it when they were unobserved.

RIO DE JANEIRO

Miss Katharine Lee:

On board Str. Argentine Liberator. At sea.

Think advisable you transship Barbados to L. & H. Liner—our Mr. Arguilles meeting you on board—acting as escort remainder of trip.

FULHAM & PENNINGTON.

they'd send an Englishman from their own office to escort you—not a Brazilian or Portuguese! You ask Jack Fowler to advise the Barbados cable-station: 'No such person aboard.' Then ask him to send this message over his own name:

Str. Argentine Liberator. At sea.

Fulham & Pennington,

Rua d'Ouvidor, Rio de Janeiro:

Did you send message to any passenger this boat? Suspect irregularity—or criminal conspiracy. Answer.

FOWLER, RADIO OPERATOR.

In the course of the afternoon a reply came from the solicitors to the effect that they had sent no message whatever to the *Argentine Liberator*—thanked him for reporting an evident forgery, which they would endeavor to trace from that end—and asked if he would oblige them by reporting any similar message in which their name or that of a client of theirs was mentioned.

On the second day following the steamer anchored in Bridgetown Roads behind the breakwater and started refilling her bunkers—the passengers having several

hours ashore to see what Barbados was like.

Coffin had taken the two girls over to Hastings for tiffin at the Marine Hotel, thinking they would be safer there than in the crowded narrow streets of the little town, in case anybody happened to recognize either and started something. At the agents' office, Captain Connynsby found a letter from Sir Jason waiting for him—in which the owner explained his idea of seeing how the *Argentine's* officers would handle a woman of Mrs. Hardcastle's type, giving that as his reason for sending her aboard with complimentary transportation. He admitted that he had considerably underestimated her capacity for mischief—but hoped that, with the lady permanently removed, they would accept his apology and get back to their former pleasant relations with each other.

This letter opened Connynsby's eyes to the fact that they all had been simply played with by a woman who—though not quite in the adventuress class—generally managed to stir up trouble wherever she went.

The Captain was watching for Coffin when he returned with the girls and put them aboard the agents' launch. The mate, thoroughly understanding the real decency which had made his superior officer merely putty in the hands of the woman, met him halfway—and then asked his coöperation in preventing something he was getting apprehensive about.

Ned lowered his voice confidentially.

"One of our passengers, sir, is a niece-in-law of Fernshaw's. I had a letter from him asking me to look out for her in any way I could and stating that she might be running considerable risk from a scoundrel in Rio who is trying to get away with a bunch of money left to her. (You remember that Fernshaw crossed the Atlantic and Indian Oceans with us before you took over the boat at Batavia.) Well—a fake radio was sent to the girl instructing her to transfer to the Lamport and Holter, here. She asked Fowler to report: 'No such person aboard.' The sender of that message was to have met her here in Barbados and gone down with her on the other boat. What I'm looking for is that he may find out she's really with us and try to book for the run to Rio. Three of our passengers leave us here—the agents have booked a married couple and a Pernambuco sugar man in their places, which

makes us full up again. But agents have a way of booking all they can, taking the chance that a master will double up some of his officers to make room—which happens to be against the Brock regulations, as you know. Of course all extra booking is subject to your approval in the circumstances. So if that Rio skunk has managed to secure transportation, you are in position to cancel it—in fact, the Company regulations stipulate that such booking is taboo."

"I'll go straight to the office and settle that matter now, Ned! If the fellow is aboard, as seems likely, he'll just take his luggage ashore again! Anything we can do for Fernshaw is practically as good as doing it for our owners, because they're pretty close friends—quite all the excuse necessary even if the regulations didn't forbid extra booking."

COFFIN'S hunch proved to have been well founded. He and the two girls had noticed a couple of men at a neighboring table when they were lunching at Hastings—one of them quite good-looking, in a swarthy South American way, the other a little too deferential for a friend, but too well-dressed and at ease for any sort of servant. They had noticed these men frequently glancing their way, but the girls were used to being stared at and paid no attention to this. What they failed to see was that the better-looking man was glancing from something in his lap to Katharine Lee's face, as she sat by one of the windows overlooking the sea. Coffin, stealing an occasional glance at them, unconsciously fixed both faces in his memory until he would have recognized them anywhere. Had he heard what the fellow muttered to his companion in Portuguese, he would have been instantly on his guard—but of course he didn't.

"Different hat and dress—but you observe, unquestionably, the same face! I heard the officer address her as 'Miss Lemartine'—which means nothing at all—just the sort of thing she would do in going to Rio. Doubtless the passengers suppose that to be her own name. I don't like that officer's looks! One of those muscular Englishmen who fight with the fist in such a brutal way. But he can't know anything of her affairs unless she has told him—about the last thing she would risk doing. Here! Take the photograph, under the table! Compare it yourself!

Eh? No possible mistake? It was luck—my finding the picture among Lee's papers! So—it is settled. We go aboard—take a stateroom at once—remain in it until at sea."

His companion hesitated, demurring:

"Suppose the Captain objects? The agents said it was doubtful if he would double up any of his officers or let them mess with the *maquinistas*. These limited-accommodation boats are not equipped for stretching beyond their saloon capacity—and the masters regard passengers as merely incidental to their boats' regular business."

"He probably wont object after we're on board—but I've considered that point. You know John Forster, the Pernambuco sugar man. At a pinch, he might say you are a business acquaintance with whom he wants to discuss several matters going down. He's here in the hotel, now—see him before he goes aboard—get him to back you up with the Captain if necessary. He may take you when he would object to both of us—especially as you look more like a Yankee than a Brazilian. If you succeed in sailing, you'll find some opportunity for earning the money with little risk to yourself. Two thousand milreis, now. Five thousand more in Rio if you are successful."

"It ought to be more than that! You'll stand to make at least three million milreis—if I pull it off!"

The handsome young man scowled.

"Do not overlook the fact, Joao, that I expect to do the job myself at first opportunity. If I do not get it on this steamer, another will occur in Rio. But I will give you ten thousand—that's as high as I will go. Take it or not, as you please—but if you do not, I shall not consider you again when I wish something done."

WHEN Connynsby saw the agents, they admitted that they had just booked two more passengers than the saloon complement, leaving it to the purser to find berths for them wherever it could be done. When the Captain absolutely vetoed this as being against the Company's regulations and said there were excellent reasons against it anyhow, there was nothing more to be said. Going aboard, he found the married couple from Barbados sitting in the saloon with their luggage and waiting for a room to be found for them. Their

ticket called for Stateroom 18, but when Connynsby knocked on the door, a voice inside said the passenger wasn't feeling well, and would he please go away. He told the man he could open the door or have it smashed in—and the passenger, Joao D'Agosta, unlocked it. He looked like a Frenchman with English or American blood—not in the least like the sort of Brazilian the Captain expected to find. But the man on the upper berth, apparently a stranger to the other fellow, had more of the appearance looked for. He was uncompromisingly routed out with his baggage and sent ashore with one of the stewards. D'Agosta had been ordered to accompany him, but John Forster happened along just then and—rather against his wishes—offered the man an upper berth in his room if the Captain permitted him to remain aboard, having booked the entire room for himself—inasmuch as the fellow was a business acquaintance.

"Very well, Mr. Forster—if you'll take him in, he may go down with us. But it's distinctly understood that Mr. D'Agosta eats at a second table. I'll not ask one of my officers to mess with the engine-room greasers or wait for second table just to carry an extra passenger whom we're not fitted up to accommodate. —Really, Senator, fancy you'll be more comfortable if you wait here a couple of days for the Lamport & Holt boat. They're built with sufficient accommodation to stretch a bit if necessary. What?"

"Of course I must do that if you insist, Captain." The man spoke very pleasant English. "But the liners all make three or four stops on the way down—I'll save at least five days by going with you, and that's worth something in my business affairs. I will certainly give you and Mr. Forster as little annoyance as possible."

Before sailing, Connynsby put it up to the mate—saying he would send the man ashore if Coffin thought it advisable. Ned had seen the man at dinner and recognized him, but didn't think he could be mixed up in Miss Lee's affair—and it was good business for the line to take him if it could be done comfortably.

"He certainly was with that man Arguilles, over at Hastings, sir—but may have been merely a casual acquaintance. Arguilles was the name mentioned in that fake radio which the Rio solicitors say they never sent—there's little doubt but that he would have made some attempt against

Miss Lee. But you sent him ashore and know that he didn't get back on board. I guess there's not much risk in letting this other bird go down with us—I'll keep an eye on him. We know John Forster is all right, and he vouches for the fellow."

IN this decision Coffin made a mistake, as he presently found out. For the rest of his life, he will not be inclined to trust any unknown person without the best of credentials. D'Agosta had the appearance of a respectable Latin-American businessman who cared too much for his reputation to do anything obviously criminal, and though not a handsome man, was sufficiently well bred to make the women like him.

He gave no indication of having ever seen Katharine Lee before—made the acquaintance of three other women before they brought her and Marjorie Banton into the group without the formality of introductions. The man's face appeared vaguely familiar to Marjorie, but she couldn't place him until Ned reminded her of the two men who had stared at her in the Marine Hotel. He said he didn't believe D'Agosta could be mixed up in any of the other fellow's schemes, but suggested that she be on her guard when he was around.

Now, when a person has the appearance of a gentleman, and is evidently engaged in business which other men know about, one does not conceive it possible that he would in any circumstances consider a cold-blooded major crime—for blood-money. The two propositions are seemingly incompatible. Had anyone on board suggested that he was making the trip for the sole purpose of contriving the death of a handsome, likable girl who never had injured him, the idea would have seemed utterly preposterous. He made no attempt to cultivate Katharine's society more than that of the other women. Coffin, of course, was looking for trouble from any direction—and therefore abnormally observant of little things.

The first of these trifles to attract his attention was that D'Agosta was drinking a good deal of French brandy in addition to the table Burgundy which is habitual with most Latins. He also had the Brazilian habit of excessive coffee-drinking—and the smoking of black, rat-tail cheroots. According to the usual effect of these stimulants and narcotics, he

should have been as nervous as a tarantula all the time—but the more D'Agosta took of them, the more deadly quiet he became.

Presently there was an evening when they were crossing the Equatorial Current and ran into a fairly heavy sea which gave the boat considerable motion. The passengers had come up to the boat-deck after dinner, as usual—finding that unless their chairs were lashed to the skylight-rails, they slid down to leeward. Some of the more venturesome were getting sea-leg practice by walking up and down the deck—among them, D'Agosta. After a while he fetched up by Katharine Lee's chair—asking her if she didn't want to try it. The trick is both good exercise and good fun if one's balancing instinct enables him to keep a perpendicular position unconsciously, no matter which way the ship is rolling—but dangerous in various ways if you're a bit clumsy or unsteady.

As the two started off, forward, Marjorie had a feeling of vague uneasiness. Getting upon her feet, she went after them, keeping her poise much better alone than if depending upon a man's arm to steady her.

As eight-bells struck, the mate came down from the bridge—recognizing her when she came into the light from the smoking-room door. The sky was heavily clouded over—one had to get accustomed to the darkness after coming out of the lighted saloon before it was possible to make out near-by objects. Not seeing Katharine with her, Coffin asked:

"Where's Kate?"

"Doing a constitutional with Senhor D'Agosta—they've just gone down aft again."

"Come along! We'll trail into the procession. A moonlight night would be better for this sort of thing."

AS they passed Miss Lee and the Brazilian, Coffin saw that they were apparently the only couple walking about at the moment, and swung noiselessly around behind them—rubber-soled shoes and the wind through every loose rope or stay blotting out even the slight padding of feet on the deck. It is probable that D'Agosta never thought of glancing behind him or supposed anybody near enough to really see motions of the leg or arm—and he was evidently timing the motion of the boat so as to be passing opposite the open

*"He looked horribly
still—she touched him.
Unquestionably dead!"*



space between two boats at their davits, where there was no protecting rail outside of them. Unless the mate and Miss Banton had been closely watching the couple just ahead of them, they couldn't have sworn to just what occurred. D'Agosta was on the outside, next to the boats, with Katharine's left hand grasping his right arm—both facing aft. Suddenly, as the ship rolled down to leeward, his feet appeared to slip so that he slid down against the stern of the No. 3 boat, grasping the gunwale with his left hand and pulling Katharine along with him. As he did so, his right arm slid around her waist and he swung her straight through the opening between the two boats. At a distance of ten feet, anybody would have sworn the whole occurrence was pure accident—but the couple immediately behind them had seen every motion.

Instantly diving to the deck—much like a football tackle—Coffin managed to get a firm grip on the girl's ankle just an instant before she would have gone overboard—and catching one of his own legs around the chock in which the No. 4 boat rested, hauled her back with the upheave of the deck until both were safe—grasping the chock.

D'Agosta stepped hastily toward them with profuse apologies—but a reflection from the smoking-room door struck upon something glistening in his hand. Before he could steady himself on his feet to use

it, the mate's fist shot out and caught the scoundrel upon the point of his chin—so that he staggered back through the same opening between the two boats into which he had tried to hurl the girl.

As nobody even tried to catch his ankle, he instantly went overboard.

Coffin automatically wrenched a lifebuoy loose and threw it after him, then shouted to the bridge. Contact with the water lighted the chemical flare on the buoy—enabling the steamer to back down close aboard of it when the engines were reversed. If the man had reached it, a line could have been hove down to him—after wrapping it securely about his waist, he could have been hauled aboard—or, with a line fast to him, one of the officers could have gone overboard after him. But it was no sea for launching a boat except at prohibitive risk. D'Agosta was not clinging to the buoy when it was directly under the steamer's lee, nor did the powerful searchlight pick up any trace of him within a half-mile radius. After sweeping the surface of the waves for nearly an hour, Connynsby gave him up and the steamer proceeded.

The young Brazilian's tragic end was a shock to everyone in the saloon until Coffin and the Captain grew a bit tired of the misplaced sympathy. The two girls and the mate testified absolutely to what the scoundrel had attempted to do—the knife which he had tried to use upon the

mate and Miss Lee was picked up from the deck. A search of his luggage in Mr. Forster's room produced an envelope stuffed with hundred-milreis notes—and penciled upon the outside was the memo: "*Ten thousand more in Rio if successful.*" The proof was clear beyond argument; the scoundrel had met the death he richly deserved—and that was that.

DURING the remainder of the run to Rio, Coffin had little apprehension as to anything serious happening. When they anchored off the landing-mole in the beautiful landlocked bay,—the most beautiful harbor in all the world,—Coffin advised the girls to remain aboard until he had secured a little preliminary information. At the agents' office, where both he and Connynsby were well and pleasantly known, he asked the manager for a note of introduction to what he considered the most thoroughly sound and reliable banking-house in the city and presented this to the resident manager within half an hour.

"Mr. Frobisher, will you be good enough to give me the name of some firm of solicitors in whom you, as a banker, have absolute confidence—men whom you would trust implicitly both with the bank's legal affairs and your own—if there is such a firm down here."

"H-m-m—solicitors whom you wish to handle some of your own affairs, I presume? W-e-l-l—I can mention two whom I think would fill the bill—but I'd say Fulham and Pennington, first. An old house—this is the second generation down here—solicitors for the last couple of centuries in London. They handle all of our business, and that of your agents' as well—in fact, they'd have mentioned the same firm had you asked them."

"And if they sent for Mr. Harry Lee's niece, from New York, you think they would be able to give her adequate protection while she is in Rio?"

"Probably have her as a guest in Pennington's house at Tijuca not far from Lee's hacienda. Pennington has a number of English servants and grooms—who ride and shoot equally well. He breeds thoroughbred horses on his estancia. Yes, if he detailed two or three of his men as a special bodyguard, I fancy the young lady would be well taken care of. We supposed that he would suggest her coming, though of course they're very close-

mouthed in his office—because we were Lee's bankers—have more than half a million milreis now on deposit belonging to that estate. Young Carmo Guanabarra, the claimant under the last will, has attempted to make us give him some of it through the courts, as he is one of the executors named in it. But that will must be probated without contest before we turn over a penny. Fulham and Pennington are quite positive the will is a forgery—although Lee's English housekeeper and his gardener say they were called in to witness it in his presence and that of Guanabarra, who told them what the document was and where to sign their names."

"I'll be glad to have any information you can give me in regard to the matter, Mr. Frobisher—but I think I should take Miss Lee and her friend to see their solicitors first. There was an attempt made to kill Miss Lee on our steamer, coming down—pretty close call, too—so you can understand why we're looking out for her to the best of our ability. Another uncle of hers, a confidential agent for Lloyd's made the last round voyage with us. We'll do anything in our power to serve him or any relative of his."

"I wonder if you're referring to Philip Fernshaw? By Jove! If he's also interested in the Lee estate—and, come to think of it, Lee had a policy with them—that young impostor won't have a walk-over in getting it. But you'd best watch out! He's said to be jolly handy with any sort of weapon—no objection whatever to killing anything in his way—bad reputation up in the coffee district."

FROM the bankers Coffin went directly to the offices of the solicitors in the Rua d'Ouvidor, and asked for Mr. Pennington—to whom he described the voyage down, Mr. Fernshaw's request that he look after the two girls to the best of his ability—and frankly stated the steps he had taken to assure himself that the law firm was reliable. This opened the solicitor's eyes to the fact that he was not dealing with the ordinary ship's officer. Vaguely, at first, bits of what he had read in the newspapers concerning the *Argentine Liberator's* last voyage came to him. And presently he was suggesting that Coffin proceed immediately to his place up back of Tijuca with the girls—remaining there as guests of the family as long as they were in Rio. He said it was quite probable that Carmo

Guanabarra had employed men to watch their city offices and report upon any young woman who came to see them, but that passengers from a ship in the harbor, evidently sight-seeing around Rio, would be likely to pass unnoticed. (Coffin had taken the precaution of coming ashore in plain clothes.)

THAT evening, after dinner in the solicitor's comfortable old *casa*, the four sat down in his study to go over the situation concerning the estate—Pennington giving them the whole story as he knew it.

"At the time of his death, we had supposed that Harry Lee was in perfect health. He was in our offices the day before, consulting me about selling some of his securities and reinvesting in others. Frobisher says he was in their safety-vaults the same afternoon—undoubtedly removing a number of securities from his box and taking them home for examination. He had a secret safe in his library, somewhere—we don't know where. Until a will is admitted for probate, we can't legally search for it, though we've examined the room carefully to form some idea as to where it might be. Young Guanabarra had been called down from the larger coffee plantation to go over the accounts with Lee—had been in the house with him for several days. As he frequently came down on such errands, it is quite possible that he located that safe and looted it after Lee's death. He certainly has seemed to be in funds. And from your description, Coffin, I've little doubt that he was the 'Senhor Arguilles' whom your Captain put ashore at Barbados. If so, he can't get here for another five or six days, and we'll be fairly safe in going over Lee's house. I'd like to have you question his English housekeeper."

"Just what has she told you about that last will, and his death, Mr. Pennington?"

"First—she thought that he had a number of business matters on his mind that morning when his breakfast was served—seemed to be in deep thought—asked Guanabarra occasional questions in an irritable manner, but otherwise seemed in his usual health. Was busy writing and going over papers in his library all the morning, while the young fellow came down to his city office and returned for tiffin. An hour or so after tiffin, Guanabarra came out after Mrs. Blodgett, whom he found in the kitchen—told her to get

the gardener and come into the library to sign a paper for Mr. Lee—something she had done upon previous occasions. When they entered the room, Lee was leaning back in his desk-chair after having, apparently, just signed that last will—though she is positive the ink was dry—and black. She noticed that his eyes were fixed, as if he had something on his mind—too much to pay any attention to her.

"Guanabarra did all the talking—asking Lee one or two questions which he may have answered with nods—or may not. He told Mrs. Blodgett and the gardener that their employer had just signed a new will and wanted them to witness it—taking the document over to a smaller table and showing them where to write their names, after which he affixed the usual seals and dismissed them. Shortly afterward, they heard him leaving for the city in one of Lee's cars.

"About four, she knocked upon the library door to ask Lee about something, but got no answer. Thought it strange—went in—saw him sitting before the desk in exactly the same position as when she'd seen him last—with one hand partly in a shallow drawer of the desk directly in front of him, as if he had just slipped the will in there. He looked horribly still—rigid—she touched him. Unquestionably dead! She telephoned for his doctor at once—and then for me. Guanabarra returned after we'd been in the house an hour or so—seemed very much shocked for a moment, but not really upset. Said he thought Lee had been fearing something of the sort when he drew up that last will in the morning.

"The doctor and I removed the body to Lee's own room and went over it very carefully. Except for a small puncture surrounded by slight discoloration, on his right thigh, we found no wound or trace of foul play. Doctor wasn't satisfied—said he knew that Lee had no organic trouble with his heart—performed an autopsy, but found no trace of poison in his stomach. He did, however, find an abnormal condition of the blood in the arteries running up to the heart from the right leg—a similar condition to that produced by a poisoned dart from the long blow-guns used by the Indians of the jungle up-country, which causes death in two or three minutes if the poison gets fairly into arterial blood. We searched the library again but found no trace of such a dart or any instrument

which might have made the tiny puncture in the leg."

"It could have been a hypodermic—no?"

"Yes—the doctor and I are fairly convinced it *was* a hypodermic. But how the devil are we going to prove it? Even analysis of Lee's blood with the microspectroscope shows no trace of any known poison. The puncture could have been the bite of a poisonous insect. When we saw Guanabarra again, he took the will from the drawer of the library-desk—showed us that Fulham and Pennington were named as co-executors with him—but said that he would not turn it over to our firm until he had retained a lawyer to protect his personal interests—would call upon us with such an attorney next day—which he did, leaving the will then in our possession. Fulham and I think that naming us as co-executors was the shrewdest thing the young scoundrel did. Had he named any other firm, it would have cast suspicion upon the document at once, because Lee never would have done such a thing after our many years of pleasant acquaintance."

"Did Guanabarra claim that Lee acknowledged him as his natural son before Mrs. Blodgett and others of his household?"

"No. He knew that every one of them would ridicule such an idea. He says the acknowledgment was made before his attorney, who came to the house with him to insist upon such recognition as the young fellow's right. And that brings in the Senhora de Carmelhaes—whom we consider the most beautiful diva who ever sang on a South American stage. She married a cadet of an old, highly respected Portuguese family—lived with him here in Rio for fifteen years—Lee was always one of their closest friends. After she had two sons and a daughter by him, Carmelhaes was killed in a duel with a newspaper editor. Then Zuloaga painted her portrait, which hung in our Academia until Lee purchased it for a hundred and fifty thousand milreis and hung it over the big fireplace in his library. Guanabarra and his attorney claim that he is the son of the Senhora and Lee—but have been extremely careful not to mention her name elsewhere in that relation."

"Is she still living?"

"No. Died five years ago—about the time Lee made the will in Miss Katharine's favor."

"Hmph! I'd kinda like to look over that library, Mr. Pennington! The whole proposition is clearly murder and conspiracy—to me!"

"We'll call upon Mrs. Blodgett in the morning. You understand, of course, that, as executors we're not supposed to disturb anything in that house until a will is probated. But we scarcely could be held answerable for anything an outsider like yourself with no personal interest in the estate, might do when nobody was looking. The chance of your turning up anything without ripping the place to pieces is negligible, however."

THE solicitor had no idea that Coffin would discover anything not already known in the case, because he and the doctor had made a very careful inspection of the premises. But the mate loitered behind the rest of them, next morning, when Mrs. Blodgett was showing them the house. He locked the door and seated himself in Lee's desk-chair, muttering to himself:

"Now, if I were going to construct a hiding-place for valuables in this room, where would I locate it?" The portrait of the beautiful Senhora de Carmelhaes faced him at the opposite side of the room, over the fireplace. "Walls paneled to the ceiling in Brazilian mahogany—floor of East Indian teak. Hiding-place must be reasonably handy—yet not near enough this desk to suggest itself. Behind the wainscoting? I—think—not. Tapping on it would betray any space behind. Well—where, then? Wonder if that portrait-frame is just hanging there or set into the wall? We'll have a look. Set in solid, by Jove!"

He pressed upon the canvas with his fingers, which met solid resistance from the chimney-stones behind it. "He didn't figure upon having it moved. . . . Hold on a bit! Seems to be a faint crack along the back edge of the frame—wonder if the thing swings out on cantilever hinges? That construction would be easy enough. If it does work that way, there would be a latch or catch upon one side or the other! H-m-m—that portrait ought to be associated some way with the safe—because it was undoubtedly more in his mind than anything else in the room."

He tried to find evidence of a spring—outside, and then inside, up the chimney—without success. Suddenly it occurred to

He saw a plate of steel with a ring-handle, and pulled outward on it.



him that the painting might swing outward from the bottom, balanced by a counterweight inside the walls. Feeling along behind the molding under the mantel-shelf, his fingers touched a small knob, which he twisted and turned and pushed until the big life-size canvas moved slowly outward on two sectors held by a counterbalance. Plugging the small lamp from Lee's desk into one of the mantel-sockets, he got up on a chair and shoved the light behind the picture until he saw a square plate of japanned steel with a ring-handle sunk into its surface, and pulled outward on it. There was no lock—and the dust in the cavity behind it showed that nothing had been disturbed for several months at least. In a wire desk-basket there were a small package of securities, a Lloyd's insurance policy, and a sealed letter addressed to Fulham & Pennington, Solicitors—Rua d'Ouvidor.

After making sure that there was nothing else in the cavity, Coffin pulled the steel plate shut and pushed the picture back until he heard the catch snap in place. Then he dusted the mantel and chair with his handkerchief, plugged the lamp back into its desk-socket and stowed the documents in his pockets where it would have taken some one more observant than Mrs. Blodgett to notice anything unusual in his appearance.

The housekeeper had taken an instant liking to Miss Katharine and her friend—they were her employer's sort—clean white folk whom a body might de-

pend upon. She'd been urging them to stop in the house for a day or two—at least have tiffin with her. But somewhat to the surprise of the others, Coffin said it was extremely likely that Guanabarra was having the house kept under more or less surveillance until he returned—and he thought it much safer for the ladies if they remained but an hour or so each visit. It was obviously common-sense—even Mrs. Blodgett saw that—but none of them suspected what actually lay behind the mate's suggestion until, when safely back in Pennington's study, he turned over to him the documents he had found. The solicitor glanced through them in amazement—after hearing how Ned had discovered their hiding-place—and then opened the letter, which he presently read to them—a letter written by Lee upon the morning of his death:

My Dear Pennington:

I've just received a severe shock—from a lad I've thought well of for some time—young Guanabarra. He has done well as my overseer up-country—seemed well enough educated to imply a fairly decent family at least—and he supplemented that by boning

up on some of the Indian dialects, so that he speaks three or four of them sufficiently to have a talk with the chaps upon occasion. I put him up at one of the clubs here—had it in mind to let him climb as far as his ability would take him. Seemed rather a likable chap, you know, when he felt like making himself agreeable, though I've heard he's pretty severe on the peons.

This morning he calmly tells me that our dear friend the Senhora de C— was his mother—that he knows who his father is and means to force a recognition of the parentage in one way or another. Upon my soul, I fancied the young fool was drunk or crazy. Twice I nearly struck him for the outrageous lie—but managed to keep my temper. Told him in all seriousness that if he ever let such a statement get out publicly, her sons would shoot him like a mad dog, and I'd finish the job if they botched it. The chap may be demented. At all events, he's something in mind to do concerning whoever it is he imagines may be his father. Of course he'd never dare assert anything of the sort about me—and yet in five minutes, he destroyed every bit of confidence I ever had in him. He has just gone down to the city offices with the plantation accounts and cheques for next month's pay-rolls, up-country. When he returns, I shall discharge him and forbid him the house. No use temporizing with that sort, you know. Either one trusts them—or he doesn't. You will please be on your guard if he communicates with you in any way. With best wishes,

Your old friend,
Rio de Janeiro, May 6th. HARRY LEE.

"Coffin—you should have been Miss Katharine's solicitor instead of us—when it comes to getting results! This letter is all the proof any court in Rio will require that the last will is a forgery and that Lee was probably dead in his chair when Mrs. Blodgett and the gardener witnessed it—they were given no chance to look closely at, or speak to him. Guanabarra got away with the pay-rolls—possibly a hundred thousand milreis—and whatever negotiable securities Lee may have had in his desk at the time. I doubt if they would amount to more than another hundred thousand, because this bundle you found represents the bulk of the investments he was keeping in his safe-deposit box. The Lloyd's policy is good for its face-value—we'll turn it over to Miss Katharine as soon as we offer the first will for probate, which will be done tomorrow with this letter attached.

"After we have notified Guanabarra's attorney of this, I fancy he'll advise the scoundrel to leave Rio on the first ship if he wants to keep the money he's already stolen and escape from a murder-charge.

But it's quite on the cards that he'll be vindictive enough to do Miss Katharine mischief if he gets the chance. It seems to me that she and Miss Banton will be safer if they proceed with you as far as Capetown at least—you're loading coffee for that port, I understand—and possibly make the round voyage with you. She can give us her signature and power-of-attorney, so that we may go ahead and settle the estate without requiring her presence. Then we can forward the proceeds to her in New York or any other place she specifies."

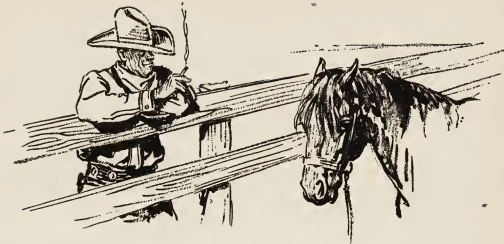
KATHARINE had been given a thinking part in most of the proceedings, but she now asked:

"When one's breakfast or tiffin down here costs two or three thousand reis, Mr. Pennington, it's a bit confusing to anyone accustomed to dollars. Could you give me an approximate idea as to how much in actual cash will come to me eventually from Uncle Harry's estate?"

"Why—I fancy it may run to a million and a half of your American dollars. Yes—all of that! And there is now practically no chance for a will-contest, because we shall prefer a charge of willful murder if such an attempt is made."

"Then—if you'll come outside with me, I'll go into executive session with my attorney for a few minutes."

When they were in another room, she proceeded: "Mr. Coffin unquestionably saved my life, coming down. Then—whether it was pure luck or knowing how to use a pretty good head—he certainly settled the whole case by what he found in Uncle's house. So I want twenty-five thousand dollars to be invested for him in good securities and handed over, through my uncle, Philip Fernshaw of Lloyd's, in such a way that he can't give it back. The law gives an executor a regular percentage of every estate he settles and you'll admit that his services in this case have been equally valuable. Then—Marjorie has been running practically the same risk as I in making this trip—at her own expense, mind you. If she hadn't found Ned Coffin in the nick of time to save me from D'Agosta, I'd have been a deader long ago. Twenty-five thousand to her, if you please—and a hundred thousand to Mother during her lifetime. When those three things are settled, I'm willing to call it a day and leave all the rest to you."



Scandalous Bill's Rodeo

The top hand of the T. V. Ranch writes home to explain the surprising events of the Chicago rodeo —by a man who is himself a noted rodeo rider.

By BUD LA MAR

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

Chicago, Illinois.
August 10, 1926.

Pete Dodinger,
Foreman T. V. Ranch,
V. On the right ribs,
Tombstone, Ariz.

ERE Friend Pete:

Well Pete, already I have been in Chicago a couple of days and I am gettin lonesome fer the old T. V. (V) Ranch and you boys. This is a hell of a place fer to be in. I rode on the train so long my legs was cramped and I was sore all over like the time I fell off that Billy horse and two three hundred steers run over me.

When the train come up to a lot of houses and railroad yards, I asks the conductor where was we, and he says this is Chicago. So I grabbed my saddle and outfit and rushed fer the door so as to git out at the depot, but after twenty minutes the train was still goin faster and not lookin like it was goin to stop. I asked that there conductor did he fergit I wanted to git off at Chicago and not in New York, and that I paid my entrance fees in the

World's Championship Bronc Riding in the Saddle and couldn't afford to go gallivantin all over the country, and to please stop right away and let me out. He said we would stop in a hour or so when we got to the station which is where I should git off. Well, I set back down, and we passed a dozen stations and I dang near had a nervous break-down, thinkin wed passed it.

Finally the train run under a big shed and stopped, which it had to as it was the end of the tracks and a big post in front of it. Even then four five people got out before me but I made it all right with all my outfit, which was purty good, fer a lot of crooks tried to grab my saddle but you may be sure they didn't git it. I got outside without gitting lost and asked a policeman where the Fair Grounds was where the Rodeo was goin' to be, and he says I'd better go first to the hotel where all the cowboys was stayin and kinda git located.

He led me to an automobile painted in bright yellor and very fancy-like. I thought it was one of them there leemousines. He told the driver to take me to the Morerain Hotel, and he was an accommo-

datin galoot and said he would take me anywhere in the city. So I loaded my outfit inside and got in and purty soon we was on the hell-bendennest trip I ever had in my life, which aint sayin little as I have took some wild rides in my day aboard some green broncs through purty rough country. I dont savy why people here want to see a Rodeo when they can get on one of them there automobiles with a locoed ripsnorter at the wheel and git more kick out of it than they'd git ridin a sure enuff salty bronc.

There was a little box on the front seat thet'd go "click" once in a while and show numbers which I thought was how many miles we had come but I soon find out different when we git to the hotel and I had to pay the driver.

Well, Pete, I wished you was here to see this hotel where yore old pard Bill is campin. I bet you would feel outa yore range, all right! But I am gittin' used to it by now and will maybe stay here after the show if I win the World's Championship Bronc Riding in the Saddle, which is very probable, as you know. You remember, Pete, we had a ridin contest at the old V. Ranch to decide which one of us would come to Chicago and enter in the Bronc Ridin' and I won without any doubts even if we did have a big fight afterwards and I won that too. You boys was to pay my expenses; we figured the room rent would be about five dollars (\$5.00) a week but it's five dollars a day. You wouldnt kick about thet tho, as the next Worlds Champion Bronc Rider in the Saddle has got to travel in style and you should be proud to even know me.

THERE is about a hundred cowboys here and they shore sport some fancy clothes. I dont expect you boys to buy me an outfit like that but I will git one myself after the show is over. Them Rodeo hands shore look prosperous and I dont know but maybe I will keep on followin 'em.

I aint seen anybody I know yit but I am gettin well acquainted with the bunk-agent. He said he would git me some real good nose paint anytime I wanted some, so you see, we are gettin purty friendly.

There is a big iron bridge right by my window on which trains come by about fifty miles an hour. There is one of them bridges over every other street, and when I go out and one of them trains go rushin over my

head, I git purty shaky and I want to stampede.

Tomorrow I will go see the horses and cattle.

Well, Pete, I will write you and the boys again soon and let you know more about it. But I cant tell you everything for you would say I was a liar.

Yours till that White Angel horse has a Cok.

SCANDALOUS BILL.

P. S. Be shore and don't go to try to ride my Billy horse, you long eared, leather-headed old coot, and anyway he would buck you off.

Chicago, Illinois.

August 13, 1926.

DERE Friend Pete:

Well, Pete, I am still able to write, which is suprisin on account of all I went thro the last few days and will try to tell you all about it. I went to see the Rodeo Grounds and its not like any you ever saw, but like a big hole in the ground and seats all around it, of which there is about a million.

The horses is all tied up in a big cellar and people walk all around 'em careless like, which you wouldn't around V. horses. So I guess they aint very bad and I wont have much trouble winnin first on horses you can shove around without them puttin their front feet in yore vest pocket. The other boys keep tellin how rough them fuzz-tails is and I would like to see em on our Devils Partner horse thet bucked all you boys off but me on account I never was on him, but you know I can ride him all right.

We was all invited to a big dance the other night and, boy howdy it was some shindig. I reckon every body in town musta been there. The Indians thats here fer the show give a war-dance right on the middle of the floor. They are Flathead Indians and shore decorate with fancy trimmins. I danced a coupla times but soon give it up as I cant do that there Charles-berg hop where you have to kick yoreself in the back every jump. Folks was all friendly but very ignerant. They would ask questions thet every shorthorn over three ought to know, such as—

"Why do you carry a clothesline on yore saddle?" and we'd tell 'em to catch horses and cows. So one of them fluffy headed brainless noosances says: "And what kinda bait do you use?"

I got acquainted with a old fat baldhead-

*Me and Broken
Box unconnects
and I sails fer
parts unknown.*



ed gent thet had a large bottle and he interdooced me to some of his friends. There was a little dried-up guy which he called Judge Leason but he would never be no judge in Arizona as he couldnt whoop a sick cat. 'Nother one was Mac Cleveland, a book-writer. He was a impertant-lookin gent and wouldn't do or say nothin only puff on a big black cheroot which he never took away from his mouth farther than three inches. He was so dignified you'd think he was related to King George. I also met Mr. Oscar Swindler, a big lawyer, and a couple other guys in the law business. Well, we had several drinks all round and everybody got to feelin purty good. The old dignified bird was puffin harder on his ceegar, and it looked like he would move any minute. So Chick Graham, the gent with the bottle, says: "Lets all take a taxi and go somewhere."

I didn't care a dang for the music so I was plumb willin to go along. It looked like there would be a big fight pretty soon anyhow on account I could tell them musicians was gettin mad. Once in a while one of 'em would get up and blow his horn shakin it at the people and wiggle all over

like he was tryin to work himself up and none of em give a hang what the others was playin! The fellow thet played the drum was tryin hard to bust it, but I guess he didn't have no luck so he would take a club and beat hell out of everything he could reach.

We all got in one of them bright colored taxies and took a few more drinks. You know, Pete, when I get some prairie-dog poison scattered thru my system, I will holler, and there aint nobody on the old V. ranch thet can yell, "Cattle, Cattle, Cattle!" louder and more convincin than what I can. You remember once we had a yellin contest and a big fight afterward, and I win both. Anyway, I guess I was doin well, fer every time we would slow down or stop on account of the traffick which is fierce, big crowds would get around the taxi and I would lean out and yell "Cattle, Cattle, Cattle!" and you ought to see all them folks go home. Oncet I hollered at a policeman, but he didnt scare worth a hoot and run after us. The driver wanted to stop but I told him to be gone and jabbed my finger in his back real hard, and he run over a couple stop signs.

WELL, we was all havin a fine time and that little box in front kept clickin away but we felt too good to worry about that. Purty soon Chick begins to holler "Cattle, Cattle!" but he couldnt of scared a lizard off a rock, so I perceeded to show him how to hold his mouth just right and how to put in the right tone, and he was doin fairly well considerin the experience he had, and after a little bit, the lawyer fellows joined in. The dignified galoot

just smoked his ceegar fer a long time but it was catchin, so he leans over to me and says, "Allow me to demonstrate how to do that properly." Then he gets both hands in front of his mouth: "Whoopee, Whoopee, Cat—tle, Cat—tle, Cat—tle!" It sounded ghostlike and sad and woulda made a full-grown steer purty mad to be talked to in thet tone of voice. It was shore good, and I wisht thet you, Pete, and the rest of the boys coulda been there.

The show starts tomorrow and we drewd fer our horses tonight. I got a pony named Broken Box. The boys says he's purty good buckin horse so I guess yore old pal Bill will be in the lead tomorrow night. I will write you and let you know.

Yores truly till White Angel is broke to ride.

SCANDALOUS BILL.

P. S. Send me more expense money. I will let you know when I git it.

Chicago, Illinois.
August 14, 1926.

DERE Friend Pete:

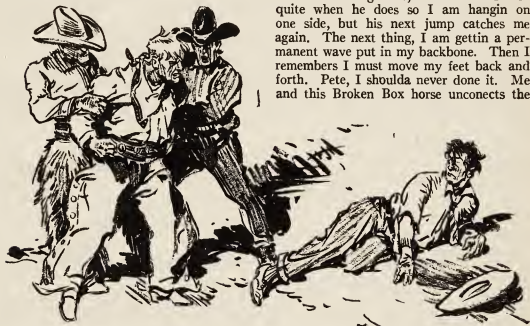
Well, Pete, you old buzzard, I will hand you a big surprise. Yore old pard Bill got bucked off! I know you will all think I am jokin on account you know I am the ridenest cowboy on the old V. Ranch and if I come in afoot a coupla times, it was becoz I had to get off to look fer tracks and my horse got away, even if Pecos City Jack would snicker every time, him bein sech an onbeleivin cuss and not at all responsible. Anyway I will try to tell you about the show, I wrote to tell you there was a hundred cowboys. I made a mistake—there is about five hundred. And you know, Pete, thet I aint the kinda cowboy thet would exgagerate things. Truthful Bill is what my handle should be. Well, we all got on our horses and rode into the arena and you should ought to been here to hear the people cheer when I would go by. It shore made them other cowboys sore, specially the fellow in front of me thet was carryin' a big flag. We all lined up in front of the chutes and you never saw so many hossbackers at one time, not even when old Slick Ears thet runs the Teapot Ranch give that barbecue picnic four years back and everybody in Cochise County was there. The cow-gals was dressed up loud and gay and shore looked sweet and purty. The announcer feller interdooced the judges and speshal karracters but plumb fergot me, and I rode out in front anyhow and waved my hat at the

people, as you know Scandalous Bill aint to be made to take a back seat for nobody. After the grand entry they had the bareback bronc-ridin which I didn't enter on account I wanted to be shore and be in good shape come time to ride my saddle bronc. You know Pete I am the best barebacker on the old T. V. Ranch and we had a contest oncet and a big fight afterward, only Pecos City Jack slipped up on me from behind and hit me over the head with a brandin iron and won it. There is a lot of rules included anyhow thet I dont say nothin about, only they want you to ride them hellions on imagination. The World's Champion Bronc Ridin was after the calf-ropin and if youd ask me, Id rize up and state that some of them rope slingers actually put their twine around them bovine's neck in a second lessn nothin. Well, I was kinda exited on account of so many people lookin on and all, as you know I am a reetirin kin of a feller. Two boys went out ahead of me and the announcer feller said they had win championships different places, but they didnt win no championship here as they both took up homesteads at different locations sitoated close to the chutes.

THAT there Broken Box horse was peaceful and quiet in the chute when I put a saddle on him. They wouldn't let me use my own saddle tho, and I will say thet them commitee hulls aint so good as they might be. There built low down in front with not much swell and the seat is plenty long enuff to 'commodate another passenger and on the back of it is a implement like we never use on the old V. Ranch; its a long strap they call a flank-strap and they buckle it up around the horses belly only its put way back behind his ribs. It will improve his performance considerable and maybe make him purty sore. But I didn't think Broken Box would need it and I was fer bucklin it loose around him on account I dont like to fool with anything I dont know much about. But they got a feller thet dont do nothin only buckle them dang persuaders and he wouldn't hear of it and would pull it up another hole everytime Id say enuff.

You know, Pete, I aint the kind of a cowboy to get nervous when I mount a bad horse but what with them other boys buckin off and goin' so high before landin and a million people lookin my way hopin I would join the birds too and the foreman

of the arena hollerin fer me to git down on him and "What the hell are you waitin fer?" I felt kinda lonesome like and sad. I could see you boys back at the old T. V. (V) Ranch comin in fer supper all happy and singin after ridin all day and I got to thinkin about all the good times wed had together with sometimes a hell of a big fight afterwards and how we was all like



I started tumblin all over his ornery carcass.

brothers and I dang near cried I am the soft-hearted and lovin. But nobody will say thet Scandalous Bill backed out of anything altho I knowed my dooty was to go back to you boys thet was like brothers to me. So I sat easy and careful in thet there comedian saddle, put both feet in the stirrups and got a death grip on the rein, which was the only connection allowed me with thet ornery undertaker advance agent. Then one of the judges rode up to the gate and looked to see if my spurs was taped and the saddle not too far on the horses withers. They shore believe in givin a bronc all the advantage. Then he says to me, sez he: "Now, cowboy, both spurs in his neck when you come out. Scratch in front five jumps, then behind the cinch. Way up high with them feet of yores and turn yore toes in, dont shine yore boots. We'll be watchin you and when the whistle blows you've made yore ride. Do as you please then—we aint watchin no more."

SOMEBODY said, "Are you ready?" and I says, "Yes," and the gates opens. There we stand, Broken Box and me.

But we don't stand long. That locoed wall-eyed hunk of buzzard feed squats and leaps headed west and I feels like I was on one of them hotel elevators, then he lands with his ears pointed due east. We must of switched directions somewhere about ten feet from the ground, but I dont switch quite when he does so I am hangin on one side, but his next jump catches me again. The next thing, I am gettin a permanent wave put in my backbone. Then I remembers I must move my feet back and forth. Pete, I shoulda never done it. Me and this Broken Box horse unconnects the

second I jerks my spurs out from under his belly. Then we connect again, sudden and hard, and I sails fer parts unknown. So you see, Pete, they framed on me or I would never got piled as you know I am the ridenest cowboy on the old T. V. Ranch (V). But them new fangled rules and regulations is too much fer me. Maybe after I get bucked off four or five times, I will learn how to do it and win some day money as I am now out of the finals, but I can ride fer day money which is a hundred sixty and forty. I am gettin so I kinda respect them fancy Rodeo hands fer they will actually go out on top of them broncs that turnin hand springs under em and act accordin to all them rules and do it a smilin.

We drawed fer horses again fer tomorrow and I got the one thet throwed thet champion this afternoon. You boys wouldnt believe how lonesome I am gettin to be fer you and the old T. V. (V) Ranch where

everything is homelike and peaceful, most of the time.

Here I am a sittin here in a fancy room purty near as high up as Kerry mountain, with trains rushin right by my window and folks runnin back and forth like ants down below in the streets—and where will I be tomorrow night this time? Thats what I'd like to know!

Well, Pete, I will go to bed wishin I was back there in the bunk-house with you all.

Yores till Snowball time in the Mohave Desert.

SCANDALOUS BILL.

P. S. I will be lookin very anxious fer thet there expense money on account I will be busted flat in a coupla days. Say, Pete, maybe if you was wantin to ride my Billy horse, I will give you the gimmick on him. Put a hackmore on him stead of a bridle. He wont buck and anyway you can ride him all right.

Chicago, Illinois.
August 21, 1926.

DERE Friend Pete:

Well, Pete, I reckon maybe yore thinkin yore old pard Bill has departed from this world and thet yore waitin fer the remains to be shipped back home on account I didnt write fer a few days. But before you get to dividin my belongings, I thought Id let you know I was still alive and able to limp along, altho slow and painful.

I will have to admit tho thet I was mistaken when I wrote to tell you them Rodeo horses was gentle. They aint. Some of them is crossed between a Montana blizzard and a streak of lightnin. They got one horse here that was presented with a diamond-studded nose bag at the New York show last year fer bein the best buckner in the world. I reckon maybe he is. I was on him fer a while, in the chute.

I got in a fight with a feller the other day on account of him makin a remark thet got under my skin. You know Pete, I am a peace lovin cowboy, but I will fight to pectect my rights and I am hell to set when I gets riled. Well, I was fixin to go out on a bronc and thet there smart hombre hollers to everybody around: "Get outa the way, folks, Tumblin Bills comin out and is liable to fall on you and hurt you." I will stand fer quite a bit of joshin but thet made me plumb sore so I come down off the chute and started tumblin all over his ornery carcass

but they pulled us apart afore I could stick my finger in his eye, but I got to stomp on his toes right hard and I guess they all know Scandalous Bill aint to be trifled with. I was fined \$10 dollars fer fightin by the judges, which ten simoleons is to come out of my winnins here. Thets a dam good joke on 'em on account I aint win a dime yet. (Ha, ha.)

The hospitals and doctors is right busy fixin up busted up legs and ribs and collar bones and already I have used a whole quart of linement myself.

Tomorrow is the last day of the show and they will give away the prizes. I reckon I wont have to hire a burro to pack mine and anyhow we dont need any of them silver decorated coffee urns on the old T. V. (V.) ranch.

Yores till Death Valley is homesteaded,
SCANDALOUS BILL.

P. S. Say, whats the matter, you lopeared, knock kneed sheepherder. I am broke and gettin desprit. Send money at once, pronto, right away, quick. I dont mean howdy, maybe or perhaps, I mean shore enuff.

Chicago, Illinois.
August 23, 1926.

DERE Friend Pete:

Well, Pete, she's all over and it was a good one and I am shore proud I helped put it over the way I did. You should heard them folks scream and holler every time I would fall off. You could tell they knowed dam well I could ride them hellions all right but I wanted they should have a good time. They come to see somebody get hurt. They also enjoy to see a spur jingler take a twenty foot dive with his head fer a shock absorber. Some boys will git bucked off but will they admit it? They will not! Theyll grab an armful of saddle and a mouthful of mane and continue right on playin back. But not me. When I lose my bearins and it begins to look doubtful, I just sail off graceful like. I had so much experience lately, I am gettin good at it. Only oncet I landed on my stomak and when I come to, I was ridin in the ambulance and three docs a holdin me. I give a wild look around and shot out of the door and fell half way across the arena. I shore bulldogged the race track gettin outa there.

Last night they handed out the trofies to the winners and thet fellow I had the fight with give me a big package. I unrapts it and what do you think was in it? An old

rusty coffee pot. When I looked around again he was gone and I aint seen him since, which is a good thing fer him if I dont never. I will shore be glad to git back on the ranch. I expect everything must be in purty bad shape since I left on account I done most of the work. You know Pete, I am the ridenest cowboy ever worked on the old T. V. ranch (V). I dont reckon I'll be wantin to go to anymore Rodeos fer a while. Pecos City Jack kin go next year. I aint jealous hearted and like to see every body have a good time. Anyway I am a reetirin kind of a cowboy and I dont like fer people to cheer at me like they done here. I am too dang modest. But I guess it aint often folks git to see a real rootin tootin cowboy from the old T. V. ranch (V) and you caint blame em much fer goin wild.

Yores till the next rain,

SCANDALOUS BILL.

P. S. Say Pete, if you aint sent me thet money yet, I wish you would do it. You wouldnt treat yore old pard Bill thet-a-way would you Pete? And leave me here like a pore starvin calf in a boghole! I will fix thet north fence like you told me too every day since spring as soon as I gets back and you know I am the best fence fixer that ever tore a pair of pants unrollin barbwire. I guess also them corrals need tendin to before fall and you would be shorthanded without me.

Tombstone, Arizona.

August 29, 1926.

Mr. Percival Skooglund,
Propriator Morerain Hotel,
Chicago, Ill.

DERE Sur:

Well, I reckon you will be surprised to hear from me as you said yourself probably you wouldnt never after you lent me fifty dollars to git home on. But also you remember I left my saddle with you and a dang good pair of chaps and my pearl handled six shooter which I wisht I had took with me on account I needed it to perforate a dirty lowdown sneakin kiote named Pecos City Jack, but I borrowed one and fixed it all right.

The boys was all glad to see me back, kinda, and I was dang happy to be back on my old stompin grounds. They did kid me a little on account of me not winnin that there championship and Pete said it was humiliatin as hell to have a hombre reepresentin the old T. V. (V. on the right ribs) ranch to be throwed so permicious and

often. But I could tell he was tickled to see me no more crippled up then I was even if he said it was too bad I didnt break my dang fool neck. You know, Pete is gruff like thet, and you would think he was hard boiled if you didnt know him right well. But he knows I am the ridenest cowboy ever forked a V. horse and theres a lot of fencin to be done before fall so he said he would ferget all about it if I would work like hell from now on. Well I was wantin to know where Pecos City Jack was and Pete says that he had rode to town on my Billy Horse a few days back to send me some money to leave Chicago on, but thet he had not come back yit. Well you coulda knocked me over with a feather I was so surprised and mad. That ornery walleyed horse thief son of a cow-rustler was in town a drinkin up my expense money!

Well I borrowed a outfit and loped in with blood in my eye and a thinkin what I was gona do to that hombre. I located him right quick in back of Kelly's pool hall where he was playin poker and a big stack of chips in front of him. "Hello Bill," says he. "There he is, boys, the ridenest cowboy in Arizona back from the big Rodeo!" I starts to say something but he cuts in quick, "Yeah! I know, Bill, they probly crooked you and didnt give you the championship, but you know we think you ought to have it. Shore, have a drink, William, yore among friends." And everybody patted me on the back and snickered—you could tell they was all proud of me. And you know I couldnt git mad no more. Them boys is just like brothers to me.

After while Pecos explained everything to me satisfactory. Said thet money fell out his pocket on the way to town and thet he borrowed a coupla dollars and got in a poker game and was a tryin to win enough to send me and thet just before I come in he was gona go to the telegraph office and send it to me but since I was here I wouldnt need it. But I borrowed fifty dollars from him which I am sendin you to git my outfit back. I wish you would send it right away on account I will have to fix fence till I git my saddle back.

Yores hopin you are the same.

SCANDALOUS BILL.

P. S. I have got a suspicion Pecos City Jack is a liar and I am thinkin there will be a hell of a big fight on the old T. V. (V.) ranch tonight when he comes back fer supper. I will let you know all about it.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Attack from Moscow" is one of the most sensational of this remarkable series—a story replete with action of the most dramatic sort.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THE great air-port of Le Bourget in the northern suburbs of Paris is now the terminal for many regular services to various parts of Europe, and is occasionally used by individual aviators who have nothing to conceal from the Customs officials, and who submit to the usual examination just as they would at any of the railway terminals. In the case of a very few privileged persons who do a good deal of traveling by air and to whom the French Government is under obligations for valuable services rendered, concessions have been made permitting them to maintain their own hangars at the further limits of the plain, beyond the Customs lines, and examination of their effects is waived as a matter of official courtesy so that they may arrive or depart by plane at any hour of the day or night without formalities.

The Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, after finishing a Mediterranean cruise with their three most intimate friends, and finally anchoring in their home port near the estate of Trevor Hall in South Devon, had spent a couple of weeks in working out the details of a new principle in radio-activity discovered by Earl Trevor—and

had then flown across to Paris in one of their own planes for a month's stay at their beautiful Paris home on the Avenue de Neuilly. Their Afghans were transferring the luggage to one of their own cars at the hangar when the droning of a heavy three-motor plane attracted their attention to the sky in the northeast, where a big craft was approaching Le Bourget.

Experienced aviators of these days will recognize the make, the general type and probable nationality of a plane about as far as they can distinctly make it out—just as a shipmaster will tell you a good deal about a passing steamer at sea when scarcely more than her masts, funnels and upper line of hull are visible, or a chauffeur knows the make and year of an approaching car when it is a quarter of a mile away. Countess Nan pronounced the approaching plane a Russian one, and Earl Trevor supplemented this by saying it was a heavy bombing type built in Germany from Russian drawings. As it clearly belonged to none of the regular services, curiosity prompted them to motor up the field and examine the bus when it landed. Being promptly recognized, no official ob-

jection was made to this, and so they were within a hundred feet when the pilot and his two mechanics climbed down from the inclosed cabin. All three were Russians of the lower middle-class, speaking understandable French—the pilot, in fact, conversing fluently in it. He explained that they had made a non-stop test-flight from Moscow, and unquestionably could have returned without coming down had they wished to do so, but that he was to see a few of the French designers, with some of his own countrymen, concerning an order to be placed by Moscow if the estimates were not prohibitive. Not knowing who the Trevor party were, or anything of their experience in aviation, he supposed from their being inside the lines that they were connected in some way with the Government, and willingly took them aboard the plane to explain how it worked—its flight-radius with cruising petrol and the regular bomb-supply, and its normal “ceiling” when loaded.

AS the man talked, some of his nervous reactions attracted the attention of Earl Lammerford and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, who had made a close study of such symptoms both in Europe and the Orient until they were really scientific experts in the action of many drugs upon the human system. The Trevors had studied the subject under them, but because of the multitudinous demands upon their time hadn't gone as deeply into the subject. From a few minutes' close observation, Lammerford and Sir Abdool decided that the pilot, Zherenski, was an habitual user of a recently developed French preparation of heroin which almost instantly steadies the nerves for a short space of time, relieves all feeling of frightful apprehension such as may be described by the word “horrors,” and deadens mental or physical pain—but in no way destroys the causes of these symptoms, and must be used continually to banish them. This compound is known to its users and to such chemists as take the risks of illicit drug-selling as Lefevrin, from the French chemist who isolated the matrix. And even as heroin is more deadly in its habit-forming effect than any other preparation of morphine known before, so Lefevrin is yet more damning than heroin. It has a more instantaneously sedative effect which lasts longer than other drugs at first, but masters the victim more thoroughly.

Chemists and physicians now consider the cure of any person—any real or permanent cure—impossible if he has taken four or five doses of Lefevrin within a month.

WHILE Zherenski was explaining the different features of his bus to the Trevor party, he stepped aside for a moment to give his companions instructions. Ptorvakín, he said, would accompany him when he left the field—returning a few hours later with a pass. Malanoff was to remain with the machine—there was some food left on board. If he wished to communicate with them for any good reason, he could hire one of the field mechanics to guard the bus and come to the restaurant of the Cheval Noir in the Boul' Miche', where the woman in the *bureau* would know where he was to be found. Zherenski told the others that he expected to leave on the return trip by the second afternoon following, but that he had business with two or three men which might delay him for a day or so—in which case either Ptorvakín or Malanoff would remain with the plane until relieved by the other, in twelve-hour watches.

They had been speaking in Russian, the slurred Russian of the masses, which Earl Lammerford and Sir Abdool understood very well and the Trevors sufficiently to get most of it—having no idea that these French or English people would know what they were talking about. And when the party drove away to the Avenue de Neuilly, Trevor asked:

“Isn't that Cheval Noir a rendezvous for most of the Russian radicals, under the rose, Lammy; particularly the soviet lot?”

“Aye. Even the Préfecture is pretty well convinced of the fact an' keeps the place more or less under espionage when they have reason to suspect that any of the more virulent crowd are in Paris. This chap, I fancy, is not one of the regular politicals engaged in spreading soviet propaganda—may be unknown to them. But if you ask me, I'd say he'll not leave the city without a whacking big supply of Lefevrin—which it is against the law to use, or take out of the country. Judging by his condition out at Le Bourget, I'd say it was impossible for him to fly that plane here from Moscow without a dose of the drug at least every ten hours. Of course the usual dose is a small one—a couple of tablets from a small bottle. Now, if Zherenski can procure the genuine stuff

and get it aboard that big plane of his without being arrested, he can carry back to Russia enough to make several thousand men irresponsible for their actions between doses. Incidentally he can make a small fortune from the proceeds of one trip. What sticks in my mind, is the sort of men in Moscow to whom he might be taking that drug. What is the social or official position they occupy? If they happen to be men and women of any standing,—and the chances are that such a class would be the very one most likely to use it,—you've got a mental condition over there which would account for a good many of the brutal atrocities which have been committed, and goodness knows what devilment brewing for the outside countries at any time. D'ye know, I fancy Abdool an' I might turn up somethin' in-t'restin' if we keep this chap Zherenski under close observation while he's in Paris. What?"

"Faith, I've a notion to go with you myself, Lammy!" remarked Trevor.

"Wait a bit! Suppose you, Nan and Raymond keep entirely out of it while Abdool an' I learn what we can of the chap here—then get to Moscow about the same time an' see what we may catch him at, there. It's probable enough that we can get messages out to you by our private code, because every message appears to be a straight business communication with no evidence of hidden meaning to arouse the censor's suspicions. Very good! Then if we do stumble upon a scheme of this bounder's which means serious consequences to any of the outside countries, we can warn you sufficiently in advance to block it, probably—unless we have rotten luck. Catch the point?"

"Perfectly! It's a good suggestion. Only—you'd best give us the names under which you'll go to Russia, and a description of your makeup. Then if we get no word after a certain length of time, we'll go to Moscow after you—go officially, under our own names, with authority as special diplomatic commissioners—and somehow get you out."

"Don't do anything of that sort too quickly. We may have to get out through Siberia, or down the Khyber Pass into India."

ZHERENSKI dined that evening at the Cheval Noir with a fellow-countryman who had lived in France long enough to

become thoroughly Gallicized and pass everywhere as a Lorraine Frenchman. His ostensible business was that of a dye-stuff manufacturer, with a side-line of byproducts in commercial drugs, at which he was said to have made a fortune. As far as the Préfecture knew, he was a thoroughly respectable member of the Parisian business world and some of its clubs—in first-class standing with the banks. Actually he owned a large block of shares in a house which manufactured medicinal drugs upon a large scale and bought crude chemicals from him. At a table near them were a Russian university professor and a Rumanian confrère whose talk, in fluent Russian, they occasionally caught. In fact, so thoroughly were they convinced that the professor and his friend were fellow-countrymen and, as such, undoubtedly more or less in sympathy with anything they might be discussing, that they made little attempt to keep what they said at so low a pitch that the other pair couldn't overhear at least parts of it.

"Look you, Zherenski! We are agreed upon one point as a beginning. You wish to purchase a certain amount of our 'Class A' goods, and you think our price is somewhat high for so large a quantity? Very well—I agree! I will accept your price—which I suppose is fair enough for such an amount, though we never have sold as low as that before. So far, we are in accord. But we now come to the difficulty of delivery, which is a much more serious matter. If you were to send a motor-lorry to our warehouse, openly, we could not deliver you any such quantity even on the supposition that it was to be consumed in other departments of France without exporting an ounce. How do you suggest getting it into your plane?"

"Load a lorry with cases of permissible chemicals for Amiens—cases marked on the outside as such, but containing our shipment inside. You are constantly making such deliveries—nobody will stop you after a perfunctory examination at the first barrier. The lorry will leave Paris late in the afternoon, reaching Amiens next morning. Thirty kilometers north of here there is a flat plain upon which I can land without difficulty. I will be forced down by a leak in my petrol-tank—making repairs when your lorry reaches the spot, showing a single red lantern. We can transfer the stuff to the plane in less than an hour—"

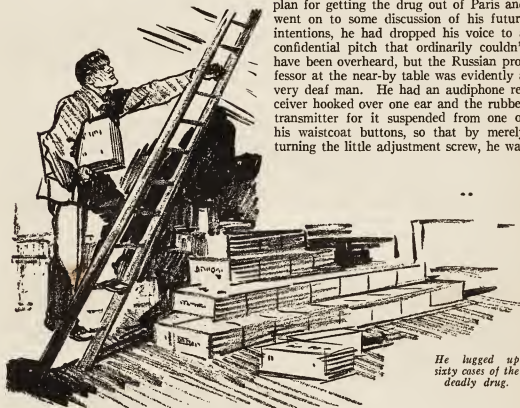
"But if we're caught at it?"

Zherenski shrugged disdainfully.

"I'll manage to get away with it—they'll not stop me. Which leaves no proof against you. Your chauffeur can swear he was held up with a pistol and forced to let us take his load—nobody's business what we wish to do with the stuff it was

Government is now assuming a stiffer, less friendly tone with us—we all think it is time those money-grubbers had a lesson which will pull 'em up a bit and teach 'em to respect us! It's all rather vague as yet, but I expect a change of attitude when I return."

When Zherenski began describing his plan for getting the drug out of Paris and went on to some discussion of his future intentions, he had dropped his voice to a confidential pitch that ordinarily couldn't have been overheard, but the Russian professor at the near-by table was evidently a very deaf man. He had an audiphone receiver hooked over one ear and the rubber transmitter for it suspended from one of his waistcoat buttons, so that by merely turning the little adjustment screw, he was



He lugged up sixty cases of the deadly drug.

supposed to be. And you've influence enough with the Government to keep the whole affair quiet."

"Possibly—but we run a serious risk all the same. I agree—upon condition that we charge an extra two per cent for that risk and send three well-armed men with the lorry—doing our best to get you safely into the air without being stopped. *Apropos!* When you were last in Paris, you rather hinted at pulling off some big political *coup* after you had tested out your big plane and knew how much actual cruising radius it had. Have you still in mind something of the sort?"

"Yes—and I'm nearer the point of actually trying it out. The Commissars wouldn't listen, for one reason or another—were doing other things under the surface which might conflict, couldn't think of it openly, anyhow. But the British

able to pick up every word said at the other table as easily as his own companion's remarks. Incidentally he really had a very acute sense of hearing. When the aviator and his friend went out, Sir Abdool asked the professor whether he thought there would be any point in having them arrested at the rendezvous, as they could easily do with the information in their possession.

"Faith, if M. le Préfet knew what we do about them, he'd have both those bounders behind the bars before morning! And then the deputy or senator who is getting his rake-off on the exportation of the drug would manage to make it hot for the Préfet in various ways. After which our good friend would reproach us for getting him to monkey with something we might have known was loaded. Zherenski would be released, probably get his stuff out of

the country in some other way, an' be so cursed suspicious of everyone that we'd have difficulty pickin' up anything in Moscow. But for one reason, I've almost a mind to do it just the same! If there are several men in that town holding official positions who happen to be drug-addicts, and their regular supply is cut off just at a time when they're depending upon gettin' at least six months' quantity of it, they'll simply go crazy. If there are enough of them, that might smash the dictatorship with a series of brutal murders on the inside. This, however, is all pure imagination—we've no evidence whatever that anyone in authority, there, is an habitual user. If Zherenski's trade is mostly with unimportant people, we'd gain nothing by such action and lose a lot of valuable data which we're pretty sure of getting in Russia. From what the fellow said, I fancy we'll not get anything of importance by trying to shadow him, here—his main object is obviously a big supply of the drug. If he talks about other plans at all, he'll say more in Moscow than he will here. My impression is that we'd best take to-day's plane for Berlin and change there in the morning to one in the Moscow service, which will get us there about the time Zherenski arrives—probably a bit ahead of him, which gives us opportunity for getting in with friends of his. We'll spot some of the drug-addicts and start an acquaintance with them."

IT was a regular custom with the Free Lances to obtain, in ways they had found workable, a number of passport-blanks whenever they spent a few weeks in any particular country. Their relations with Downing Street and the French Préfecture were so close and friendly, because of valuable services rendered, that they were permitted to see and photograph any passport turned in by a person entering the country whenever they had a good reason for doing it. So whenever they found it necessary to have in their possession a duly viséd passport issued by any government it merely was necessary to use one of the blanks they had collected and have the names and seals forged upon it. According to the passports presented for visé at the airport in the suburbs of Moscow, Earl Lammerford was Professor Sergei Damanov, who had left Moscow three years before to accept a chair at the Sorbonne; and Sir Abdool was Gregor Larescu,

a Rumanian interested in one of the French chemical houses, traveling under a passport of four years back. Each passport, of course, bore several visés from different cities in Europe acquired during that period—in fact, they were so very much the real thing in appearance that none of the officials dreamed of questioning them. As their luggage was merely one large portmanteau for each, covered with various hotel-labels, the Customs formalities didn't detain them over three hours, after which they were free to go where they pleased in the city and find a hotel or lodging which suited them. Had they belonged to any of the outside countries, their passports would have been held for several days before being returned to them.

During the three hours at the air-port, they fraternized with some of the mechanics—telling them that they had left Paris just as Zherenski arrived, after what he claimed to be a nonstop flight. All the men at the field told them that if Zherenski claimed to have made the flight without stopping, that settled it, as he was known to have gone as far into Siberia and back without coming down. Opinion seemed to be unanimous that, when the man was feeling in just the right condition, he not only was an unusually skillful aviator but a perfect daredevil besides. They thought he drank too much when not flying, but none of them seemed to know of his drug-habit, though they said he had frequently brought in a load of very expensive chemicals which gave him a staggering profit. When asked where he could be found when in the city, they mentioned the house where he lodged, and two of the commissars who were cronies of his.

Later in the day, the Earl and Sir Abdool had no difficulty in procuring a room on the same floor as that occupied by the aviator when he was in town. Having that part of the house to themselves for an hour or two,—it was the top floor, just beneath the steeply pitched roof,—they cut a hole through the partition at the back of a closet, having noticed that a cheap American bureau with a mirror above it stood against that wall in the pilot's room where it would entirely conceal the hole.

The building was an old one on the Pskovsky near the river, about four blocks from the Kremlin. It had neither running water nor plumbing—there was an old and foul well in the court at the back, but little matters of that sort do not trouble

the masses in Russia, and foreigners were not supposed to lodge there anyhow. From a preliminary examination the two decided that it must serve Zherenski's purposes very well indeed. If he had any considerable traffic with those in the Kremlin and the neighboring buildings across the Square—used for official purposes by men connected, one way or another with the Council of Commissars—it was but a step to these quiet lodgings of his, on a by-street where they would not be noticed coming or going, at night. If he had conferences with those in power as to certain activities outside of Russia, there could scarcely be a more secluded place than his room at the top of the old building. Even with lodgers in the front room, overlooking the street and river from its two dormer windows, it would have been impossible for them to overhear what went on in Zherenski's quarters with the door closed, unless by some such hole as they had cut through the partition or through the planting of a dictaphone on the premises; and the old concierge, below, was supposed to know pretty well the sort to whom she rented lodgings at any time.

LAMMERFORD and Sir Abdool had learned from bits of careless talk at the air-port that Zherenski had an official permit to land and remove without examination any chemicals he might bring in, upon one trip or another, so they were not surprised to hear a motor-lorry stop in the street below about eight in the evening, and looking out of their dormer, see two men fetch case after case into the building, up the four flights of stairs and into the aviator's room, where they left it. When they had gone, he locked the door. Through the hole in the partition back of his bureau, they saw a pole working to push up a trapdoor in his ceiling—presumably communicating with a narrow attic-space between the top of his dormers and the ridge-pole of the roof. Evidently his own pole had a hook upon the end of it, for he caught it upon the coaming of the trapdoor and went up hand-over-hand until he pulled himself into the space above, and then lowered a ladder by means of which he lugged up sixty cases of the deadly drug—each one weighing almost twenty pounds. When he finally lowered himself into the room, pulling the trap shut with the hook, there was no evidence whatever that a half-ton of the drug could be possibly concealed

anywhere about the place. As the small area of ceiling back of the slope past the dormers was merely of boarding, between rafters, one might have examined it for some time—in the dim light from the single kerosene lamp on the table—without discovering the trap at all, and if located, would suppose it merely a means of getting up to the ridge of the roof.

As the front room was rarely occupied by lodgers, and the two present occupants made no sound, Zherenski had fallen into a habit of considering himself alone upon that floor, and frequently left his door open to the small landing at the top of the stairs, only closing it when sounds of lodgers moving on the floor below indicated that he and his visitor might be overheard. The two recent arrivals had figured that he could scarcely get there before evening and so took the chance of going out for the best dinner they could obtain before facing the prospect of spending several hours in their room without lights, in absolute silence. When they finally went to bed about one in the morning, thoroughly tired out, they congratulated themselves that they had done this.

At ten o'clock they had heard halting steps upon the stairs—then stops, with the audible wheezing of an asthmatic trying to get his breath until, when the man finally staggered into Zherenski's room, he dropped upon a chair, leaning forward with elbows on a table, fairly gasping with the effort to breathe. Presently he managed to jerk out a few words:

"Me—I am—a fool! My supply—medicine—getting very low! Feared accident—might delay you—or prevent—return! Hoarding my—little supply—desperately—make it last—long as possible! Increased interval—between—reduced doses! Man—I've gone through—hell! You've got plenty—haven't you? Say yes—damn you! Say it quick! I'm right on—the edge—now! If I—go to pieces—shoot you and—myself too! I'll take—four tablets—now! Curse it, I've got to! And I've only twenty left! Give me ten pounds—now—so I'll know—how long—to count upon it! Quick, man—quick!"

ZHERENSKI looked him over in cold, calculating appraisal—his hand upon an automatic in his pocket, ready to kill his visitor without mercy if he attempted to draw a weapon. And the man's hands trembled so that it was very difficult for

him to get out his little phial of tablets.

"Ten pounds, Sarnoviev, will cost you just ten thousand rubles, gold-standard—and I can't give them to you tonight because I can't get at the place where I've hidden it in bulk. Two ounces tonight—with the ten thousand rubles—and you can come tomorrow evening or the next night for the rest of it. Of course, if I try to welsh on you, it's easy enough to have me shot. But when you get that big supply of—er—medicine, we're going into conference about that scheme I've outlined to you once or twice. If you consent to it, get the council to wink at it, as something over which they have no control, get me such funds as I need for equipment, you may take the medicine away with you. If you don't consent to all this, I'll simply return your ten thousand rubles—and keep the medicine for somebody who is more disposed to help my plans!"

"No! No, Zherenski! You simply can't deprive me of it! I need the stuff too desperately! We'll talk it over! Yes—yes—But I *must* have the medicine!"

SARNOVIEV had furtively slipped four tablets between his lips from the phial concealed in his hand, and his breathing, though still difficult, was noticeably easier. With every moment the taut lines in his face relaxed and the congested appearance of his cheeks gave place to a more healthy color. Yet so instinctive had the course of lying and deceit become with him, the various subterfuges by which he managed to conceal the fact that he was an absolute slave to a brain- and body-rotting drug, that even as he gradually recovered a manner more at ease and responded to an almost stupefying sense of relief, he tried lightly to pass off the condition in which he had arrived as a mere temporary seizure which was largely imagination and of no real consequence. With this feeling came the disposition to haggle for a lower price, as if he actually were in a position to carry off anything of the sort.

"Really, comrade, I think you are becoming rather extortionate because you think my need puts me at your mercy! You are asking possibly a hundred times what the medicine cost you in Paris!"

"Just that! Suppose I refuse to give you these two ounces? You have but twenty tablets left. If you go to Paris by plane, they'll hardly last until you get there. Then—what? Are you sure you

could get the stuff at once—in two days—two weeks? Without a six-months' supply, you wouldn't dare risk coming back here. With it—you couldn't get out of the city unless you knew the ropes and found men who might assist you—and it would take a year to make such connections. Suppose I say definitely that you'll get no more from me at any price? Eh?"

"Oh, well—I could have you shot, as you said—and then take as much of your supply as I wish!"

"You think you know where I've hidden it, then? Suppose, about the time you're raving crazy for another dose, you find that you're mistaken, haven't the remotest idea where the stuff really is? I purposely had a load of boxes filled with sand delivered at this house, just as a blind, while I was putting the drug in a much safer place. After shooting me, you might search this house—and see what you find. Eh? Don't be an ass, Sarnoviev! There are too many who need the stuff beside yourself to see me shot—knowing their supply would be cut off for several months, until they can find some one else to fetch it in. And there's nobody else with my facilities! You'll give me ten thousand rubles, gold, tonight—or you get but two ounces! If you remain here a couple of hours, you'll not even suggest haggling over it. Like the crazy man you were when you came here, you took an overdose—and you'll be getting a reaction from it pretty soon—in horrors. You may breathe much easier, but your nerves will begin to kick! And let me give you a point while you're in condition to get it fixed in your mind: In using this medicine, never go more than four hours past the regular interval—and never increase the dose! The men and women who go about their business for some time without attracting attention to the treatment use regular doses at regular intervals. In time, of course, one must shorten the interval—little by little. But all you sufferers face the inevitable wind-up which comes sooner or later according to one's physical and nervous resistance."

"Hmph! Humorous, are you—with that 'you sufferers.' Think you can fool me, Zherenski—me, who have been through a million hells with the stuff! One of the 'regular-interval patients,' are you? Take it or leave it, when you please! Bah! You make me sick! It was knowing you're one of us which drove me half insane while I wondered whether you actually could fly

a plane back here from Paris with a load of the stuff! Next time you probably wont, you know—or the time after that—or the next one. Some day you'll go to pieces at two kilometers up—and then—*blub!* A mess on the ground—boxes with

ping a hand into his breeches pocket, he was going to fetch it out again with a little phial concealed in the palm, and finger his short mustache for a second or two—just long enough to slip a couple of the tablets between his lips without the other catching him at it—and then go right on with his assumption of being entirely at ease, in a superior position. But grope as he might, his fingers touched no phial in the pocket. He tried to remember where else he could have put it—realizing that unless he kept

"Give me ten pounds!
Quick, man—quick!"



little phials of tablets which nobody knows anything about smashed and scattered all over! And those who are waiting for you, their supply exhausted, running amok—cutting every throat they see, blazing into women and children just for the pleasure and excitement of it! Anything to blot out for the moment the horrors which are creeping nearer—*nearer—right at the back of their necks!* You talk of my getting the horrors from the overdose I took? How would you have known anything about 'em if you hadn't had 'em? Eh? Eh? You see? What are *yours* like, Zherenski?"

IT was time for the aviator's regular dose. With a half-ton of it over his head, he thought he was sitting pretty and listening, amusedly, to this poor devil of a commissar who was so entirely at his mercy. Slip-

a grip upon himself he would become panic-stricken and lose control of his actions. (Ah! The two boxes he had taken out to give Sarnoviev!) They should be in his waistcoat pocket—but he suddenly realized, in a clammy sweat, that in the close atmosphere of the attic he had taken off the garment and left it up there. Unless he could think where he'd put the phial which should have been in his pocket, he was helpless. No matter what condition might come over him, he couldn't go up into that attic with Sarnoviev in the house. It would expose his secret hiding-place, and he'd have to kill the man without scruple. . . . Wait a bit! The commissar must have his remaining twenty tablets on him, somewhere!

At this thought the aviator's tension relaxed somewhat. He could either get the

fellow out of the building long enough to reach his stuff overhead, or else simply take a few tablets from him by force. He thought he might stick it out a couple of hours more without losing control of himself, but was fully alive to the risk of not getting that far, which meant—murder. (The two listeners in the front room began to suspect the trap he was in.)

By this time, Sarnoviev was getting the first little premonition of kick from his overdose. His easy conversational manner began to slip, there were longer pauses, during which his eyes stared fixedly at the wall without seeing it—dilating with unutterable fright at what his brain did see. And presently he began describing it to Zherenski, who was fast getting into a mental condition where he saw with the clearness of a photograph what the other saw. The commissar's voice was little above a hoarse whisper.

"One million, eight hundred and twenty-six thousand official executions—since the revolution! That's the official Cheka record—and the devil only knows how many unofficial ones! The rest of us lost count! I am continually passing along a sidewalk, flights of slippery steps at the left, down into foul and loathsome cellars! From the darkness on every side, eyes glow at me. When my brain is reeling, and unconsciousness would be heavenly relief, I feel cold slimy hands prodding me back to a frightful wakefulness, with every sense alert! I hear a scuffling upon the sidewalk, then the sound of many feet descending the steps! The place becomes dimly lighted from two lanterns in the hands of soldiers! Men and women—with their arms bound—are prodded up against the further wall! One of the demon girls steps out into the middle of the cellar fingering a pearl-handled automatic! Always fairly good-looking—usually expensively dressed, with breeches and boots, furs, gold bracelets! If her target against the wall looks back at her with a smile, eye-to-eye (the cursed aristocrats often did that. They're all dead now!) she bows, and makes it an affair of but two seconds—one clean bullet through the heart or forehead. God—what shots those women are! If they grovel and beg for mercy, she laughs! I wake in the night in a cold sweat, hearing those laughs! She sends a bullet into the knee-cap or elbow—and one through the throat! They die horribly! Sometimes a matter of hours!

"At other times I walk along the brink of the sand-pits outside the city—slipping, slipping, frantically grasping at everything—but always slipping down, down, to where I land upon stiff and motionless corpses an inch or two under the sand—which gusts of wind partially uncover or bury deeper! I try to flounder out, but feel something drawing me back to the center of the pit, where there is a heaving of the mass under my feet—a clutching of hands at my ankles! *Arrgh!* Quick, Zherenski! My two ounces! . . . Another taste of the medicine or I go crazy!"

The aviator's eyes were beginning to have in them the glow of a maniac's. While seeing every horror that Sarnoviev saw, he fought to control himself a little while longer. He spoke thickly—with effort:

"The money first, comrade! Have you—got it—on you?"

"A check! . . . Yes—yes! Of course!"

The other growled like an enraged animal.

"I take no checks! You'd be a fool to risk them! If my trade is exposed, the check shows what manner of a thing you are—to everybody! No more talk of 'medicine' for your nerves—just the plain rotten truth that you're sold, mind and body, to the devil! You can get gold-notes! Go out at once and fetch them—before I change my mind!"

"At this time of night—with the banks all closed!"

"Bah! Get them in the Kremlin! There's money enough there—you've always influence enough to get what you need upon a mere receipt! Go, man! Before I get tired of this—and say I'll give you nothing—at any price!"

"And—if I say it's impossible?"

SARNOVIEV never was nearer death than at that moment. Zherenski was fast getting to a point where he knew he couldn't hold himself—racking his dazed, wandering mind to think where he *could* have put the phial which should have been in his pocket. The glare in his eyes was becoming maniacal, and in a moment the other saw it—saw the hand in the man's coat pocket, and knew it was clutching a pistol. The commissar was swearing to himself that he wouldn't—he simply wouldn't touch his few remaining tablets; but he saw that he would have to if he hoped to get any more of the drug. He could get, of course, both morphine

and heroin from a certain chemist in the city—in the morning; but he realized only too clearly that with any recourse to cruder forms of the drug than Lefevrin, it now would be impossible to gauge a dosage which he could still conceal but which easily might turn him into a raving maniac at any unexpected moment if he took a grain too much. So he hurriedly stumped down the four flights of stairs and almost ran to the main gate of the Kremlin, near the huge monstrosity erected to Lenin.

When certain that he had left the building, Zherenski locked his door, opened the ceiling trap with his pole, and lost no time in climbing up after his waistcoat with the two-ounce boxes, and another for himself. As he slid back down into the room, something slipped from where it had lodged in his breeches and fell upon the floor—the little phial which should have been in his pocket—all the time within reach of his hand, yet almost causing murder when he couldn't find it.

Sarnoviev was back in less than half an hour. It was evident that he had profited by the aviator's warning and had taken not more than one tablet to steady himself for this second visit to the old building. Zherenski, knowing exactly where to lay hand upon means of procuring his own relief at any second it was needed, was now almost urbane in his manner. Both rather sheepishly tried to carry off the impression with each other that their previous condition was simply overwrought nerves resulting from a number of causes. The two ounces were passed over in the sealed Lefevrin boxes, each containing four little phials—the gold-ruble notes were paid over and assurance given that the ten pounds would be delivered next evening. Then Zherenski improved the opportunity for getting down to his crazy scheme.

"You know in a general way what I've been proposing to do as soon as I had a plane which I was certain would stay in the air thirty or forty hours, Sarnoviev. Well—this flight has satisfied me in regard to that. I can fly to London and back without coming down. If, in any unforeseen emergency I have to land, I know of one place in France and one in Germany where I'm not likely to be discovered before I've repaired the trouble and get up again. I fly as a private individual, with my own plane—for whom the Soviet is in no way responsible—and you can disavow anything I do."

"Well—admitting all that—just what do you wish to do?"

"Drop enough high-explosive on the Parliament Buildings—at night—completely to destroy them and every human being inside at the time!"

"Including the Labor members?"

"Of course not! Nor any others known to even partly favor the Third Internationale! They will be warned by our agents in London to keep well away from Westminster upon a certain evening. The cursed English are adopting a stiffer attitude with us. They managed to control the big general strike in a way we had considered impossible! It's time they were taught a lesson that if they force the workers of the world too far—sufficiently to compel 'direct action' upon their part—they're going to get something which will destroy their capitalistic Government at one stroke. Can't you see it, man? With my big plane, it's the opportunity of a lifetime!"

"H-m-m—I'm beginning to think you're right, Zherenski! Of course there's no persuading the council into giving official consent to anything of the sort. But I imagine that three or four of us have influence enough to bring about an attitude in which the council assumes that such an attempt is too wildly absurd to even discuss, and takes no notice of what you appear to be doing with your own plane. It's really a Government boat—but it can be sold to you for any sum agreed upon and receipt given for an assumed payment. I can manage that part of it so that the council will suppose it an actual sale for value—and the explosives supplied to you for certain tests over the Baltic Sea."

TO the listeners in the front room, there was something disgusting in the air the plotters gave themselves of being thoroughly responsible men considering a certain action "for the good of the state"—when they were so very far beyond normal responsibility from drug-usage, as to be worse than paranoiacs. Within the space of a few short hours—as they and those listening to them knew beyond any possibility of doubt—they again would be abject slaves, lashed by inflamed nerves and rotting brains into recurring conditions in which there was but a hair-line betwixt them and violent insanity but for the temporary relief doled out to them by their drug-master. Yet in their fleeting false-ease they

were strutting before each other as men of the world—guiding international politics behind the scenes. There are times when sober-minded, experienced statesmen wonder if possibly there may not be quite a sprinkling of drug-addicts among those who dabble in world-politics—officially or unofficially.

Lammerford and Sir Abdool knew from long experience that any statesmen in the chancelleries of Europe would simply ridicule the story if they were told what Zherenski was determined to carry out. In a time when the whole world was practically at peace? Impossible! The act of a madman! Even knowing all about the millions in gold sent into other countries to bring about labor chaos and revolution, as the two in the front room did know so very well, it was difficult for them to believe that in the Russia of today any maniac would be permitted to carry out any such brutal, senseless outrage as this aviator proposed. But after what they had overheard, they knew he *would* carry it out—probably with entire success, unless they managed to block him in time.

They might shoot him in Moscow before he started—that would certainly settle his attempt, even if the idea persisted and some other friend tried it afterward. But until he actually committed the crime, there was no proof they could offer that he actually would or could do it—and their act would be simply murder, undoubtedly at the cost of their own lives. The only legal way to handle it was to bring the man crashing down in his plane, either over the Channel or upon some Kentish heath where nobody else would be injured, before he got over London—which meant keeping one of the Royal Air Squadrons aloft over the lower end of the North Sea for at least forty hours after the scoundrel was known to have left Moscow. Having to conserve his petrol supply in order to get back, he would take no chances by deviating from a straight compass-line of W. S. W., passing over Rotterdam and the Essex coast.

It was extremely improbable that the Government would take their story seriously enough to order the squadron out. It was too preposterous.

NEXT morning, when Zherenski had left the building, Lammerford said:

"As a supposed Rumanian, Abdool, you're far less likely to be suspected or interfered with here than I. You're in-

terested in a large chemical house in Paris—came here to conclude a business deal with certain Moscow chemists—find that the Government regulations make it difficult to do so—expect to go back and lay the matter before your house within two or three days. So if you send a radio to Raymond Carter in Paris, it's the perfectly obvious one that you'd be expected to send: '*Leaving for Paris this morning. Larescu.*' And Raymond will at once telephone it by our own radio to George in Devon. Meanwhile I take this morning's plane to Berlin—flying from there to Paris and London as rapidly as possible—should be at Trevor Hall late tomorrow night, with luck. I came here from the Sorbonne on report of a vacancy at the University—because I wished employment in my own country again. I'm leaving because there is no vacancy at a price I can afford to accept and because the conditions do not yet strike me as attractive for a peace-loving man. Will return when the country is more settled. Of course I'll be questioned, but I fancy I can get away on the morning plane just the same—nothing about me in the least suspicious. We figure that it will take Sarnoviev at least a week to put through the supposed sale of the plane to Zherenski—have it thoroughly tuned up for such a racking flight—and get his explosives aboard. At least five days, anyhow, with all the rushing both of them can do. That should give George and Nan and me time enough to see what can be done with the Home Secretary or make some preparations of our own. Now—any suggestions?"

"No—I fancy you've covered about everything we can do, Lammy. Good workable stories—both of them! Of course you'll understand when Raymond gets my radio that I mean it's Zherenski who's leaving for London at that time—and can figure when he should have flown the eighteen hundred miles. Any one of us five except Raymond will recognize that bus by the sound of her motors—if we're using George's patent muffler on our own; but the moon should be up just about the time he's crossing the North Sea, if the weather isn't too thick. You go ahead! Have your passport viséd at once. I'll be out at the air-port to see you go up, so that I'll be sure you're off. If there's any hitch, we'll just reverse the proposition—I'll leave today myself, and you can stay to send the radio."



There was a concussion which shook air and sea and land for miles around.

DOWN in South Devon, Earl Trevor and Countess Nan had been working in the laboratory and machine-shops of the big estate ever since their two friends had left for Russia. They had come over to their Paris home with the intention of spending a month there—but the discovery which Trevor had worked out on the yacht, in the Bay of Naples, was much too absorbing to let them stay, and they had flown back the next afternoon to continue their experiments with it. In his investigations for some all-powerful weapon, preferably nondestructive, which would absolutely check an attacking force before it

came within effective distance, the Earl had discovered, first, that certain discords in the music scale—when projected with sufficient force through long sections of tubing—became so unbearable that no human being could stand them, becoming dizzy from the nervous shock and utterly helpless from the torture of such a sound. This was pretty effective for short distances, but useless at long range and too easily nullified by defense. It then occurred to him that if the same discords were carried, not to the ear but to the nervous system, by impulses of radio-frequency instead of audio-frequency, they couldn't be heard—the source couldn't be determined—and unless the exact pitch to which each human system vibrated in unison could be ascertained, there was no possible defense against them. So, in his experiments upon the yacht he had demonstrated that human susceptibility lay, in the majority of cases, in wave-lengths so short as to be merely fractions of a single meter. And he had succeeded in transmitting his discords by radio-frequency with sufficient strength completely to overcome a military parade which was being held on shore at some distance from the yacht.

In South Devon they had been experi-

menting with the same type of transmitting set installed in a closed motor-lorry—and running it through the neighboring shires, had halted people on the county roads, in village streets and market squares—stopping as soon as they saw the effect was indisputable, so that the people had no conception of what it was that had rendered them momentarily dizzy and powerless.

The experiment they were most anxious to attempt, however—using the discovery from an airplane—was simply prohibitive as long as there was a possibility that other planes might be in the air in the direction their aerial-rod was pointing, because any pilot struck when the tuning-coupler reached his own wave-length could not control his plane. If the thing proved as powerful as all their experimentation had indicated, he must inevitably crash. So they hadn't demonstrated this—and with the conviction that the next war must be fought in the air, it was a point they unquestionably needed to demonstrate.

This was the situation when Earl Lammerford came down on the landing-field in one of their planes from the Bourget hangars. Dinner was served on the terrace overlooking the Channel while he was telling his story.

When Lammerford finished with the remark that they had best run up to London at once for an interview with the Home Secretary, Trevor shook his head:

"We'll do that as a last resort, Lammy—day after tomorrow. He may consent to let three planes from the Royal Air Force go up for a night to stop that scoundrel, but here's what might happen if we do get him that far, and it's even betwixt we won't! We may describe that Russian plane to those pilots to the best of our ability, but they've not heard its motors, as we have—and they can't drown the noise of their own as we do. Chances are, they may down one of the commercial planes with several passengers, instead. There's no possibility of hitting that fellow by ground-fire even if we got permission to try it—and the commercial planes might be hit instead. It seems to me that if he is stopped at all, it's up to *us*! And that's a pretty heavy responsibility—not? We can have two light planes and a couple of our larger ones in the air for nearly forty hours—all with machine-guns and searchlights. Best of all, this is the chance I've been hoping for to give my radio-discord a try-out from a plane. Haven't dared

point the aerial-rod anywhere up for fear of hitting some poor devil of a pilot and killing him unintentionally. Zherenski we've simply *got* to kill—before *he* kills a lot of innocent people! I've had a powerful installation rigged on one of our big three-motor planes, with a heavily insulated compartment for the electric discord fog-horn and honeycomb transmitter. I work the coupler and rod from the upper wing—all of us insulated with rubber and wool. It seems to me the emergency is so great that I'm justified in testing out the thing on one of the incoming steamers several miles at sea—from that big plane. We'll do that in the morning!"

ONE of the most valuable features in Earl Trevor's discovery was the fact of his being able to use it directionally. He had successfully demonstrated that, with the long half-inch copper rod on his transmitting set pointed in a certain direction, people fifteen degrees away from the point it was covering were conscious of but a slight disturbance—while at thirty or forty degrees they didn't notice it. Also that, with head and ears protected by a thick felt hood, with a rubber coat and cap, those immediately around the set were but very slightly affected—as long as the rod was pointing away from them. With these results clearly demonstrated, he thought he was safe enough in making the test upon a steamer as no plane was in sight. They went up in the big boat about ten in the morning—flying W. S. W. until they were a hundred miles beyond Ushant. As every man on the estate was devoted to the Earl and Countess (they were a picked lot, too), the three mechanics who were taken along on the flight were considered very lucky by the others, who worked upon any invention of the Trevors' as a labor of love beyond any question of their very attractive pay.

Presently they made out through their glasses one of the P. S. N. liners, due that day from Madeira and Rio. None of the crew was in the rigging—nobody in a position where sudden dizziness might send him overboard. The electric fog-horn, with its three discordant tongues of brass vibrating between magnets, was sealed up in a compartment of the cabin and connected by wires to a switch near the Earl's elbow on the upper wing, where he was strapped fast to guard against falling. Swinging the ten-foot copper rod down until it pointed

directly upon the wheelhouse of the liner, and holding it there with one hand, he switched on the electric horn, switched in all of the eight tubes in the transmitting set, adjusted the condenser and began very slowly turning the sector of his coupler. In less than a minute, the bow of the steamer fell off several points to starboard—then she yawed around in an irregular circle.

The plane was three or four thousand feet up—but through their glasses they saw the master stagger out of his cabin abaft the wheelhouse and, attracted by the faint vibration of their motors, try to look up at them. But he was too dizzy to be sure of what he saw. Along the decks, as the rod swung back and forth, passengers staggered and fell, or hung clutching the nearest object while others pitched out of their deck-chairs. A minute of this was enough. Trevor ran the sector of his coupler up to a thousand meters and cut off the current. They flew in a circle above the liner until they saw the passengers and crew on their feet again trying to find out what had happened to them. Apparently it couldn't have been anything connected with the plane, as they first supposed. There had been no explosion, no damage done—they were beginning to feel quite all right again. And the plane disappeared as if she merely had stopped to render assistance if the ship were really out of control.

On the third day following this, Sir Abdool's message came through: "*Leaving for Paris this morning. Larescu*"—relayed over their own radio by Raymond Carter from the mansion in the Avenue de Neuilly. Figuring from what they'd heard Zherenski tell the officials at Le Bourget concerning his previous nonstop flight, they thought he should be over the Essex coast about ten in the evening, and Lammerford asked his old friend if he intended sinking him over the water.

"Fancy not. Wherever he goes down, there's a chance of his hitting somebody—some steamer or sailing craft on the Holland lanes, which are pretty well congested, or somebody walking along the Essex roads. Of the two, he's less likely to kill anybody on those Essex marshes, at night—and there's one point to keep in mind: It must be shown conclusively that the bus was a Soviet one—and that it was loaded with high-explosive. If we send him crashing on the land, there'll be no doubt as to the high-explosive—and bits of the

bus will prove the nationality. We'll get the four planes into the air this afternoon an' patrol that Essex coast. Even if he makes better time than we expect, he'll not be over London until after dark, when the lights will give him a better mark."

ZHERENSKI'S impressions, and those of his mechanics, during the last ten or fifteen minutes, of course, will never be known. Presumably they were highly congratulatory as the machine passed over the lower neck of the North Sea and the lights of the Thames estuary. The roar of their own motors would drown any noise from other planes. Trevor's were all equipped with his patent-muffler and muffling screw-pitch which reduced this to a minimum. Zherenski might have known that if any hint of his purpose had leaked out, the course of the Thames up to the City, which he had to follow, must prove a trap in which no waiting planes could miss him. Just as he approached the Essex bank of the estuary, however, four blinding searchlights in the air began converging on him until every feature of his big plane stood out in strong illumination as plainly visible as the moon itself when the clouds lifted for a moment. The maniac tried to dodge them by shooting up, but the "ceiling" of his bus, still loaded with its return-petrol, was too low.

Trevor was slightly ahead of the other boats—and covered the murderous plane with his long half-inch copper rod from the top wing. None of them was holding a stop-watch to figure how long it took him to spot the wave-length of each scoundrel's nervous system and shoot the impulses into it with his full kilowatt of power, but it must have been less than thirty seconds when they saw the big engine of destruction go out of control, wobble in what must have been a sickening way to those on board—and go into a nose-dive. The other four banked to watch it drop—down—down—flaming up from its own petrol as it fell. Then—there was a concussion which shook air and sea and land for miles around. When they had steadied their planes from the whirling air-currents, Trevor said:

"Wonder if that skunk had time to swallow a couple of tablets before he struck? Not that it would have made any difference—he never knew what hit him from the second he started down! Well—that's that! Let's call it a day and go home!"



The Cold Shoulder

*A fine story of baseball and of—folks; by the
gifted author of "Dave Farren's Son" and
many other well-remembered sports stories.*

By HERBERT L. MCNARY

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THE world knows that bright lights and tinkling music and late hours and beaded liquids are not salutary diversions for a big-league ball-player; but then, Ira Braley was young and only a few years away from the farm; and the night was excessively hot for May; and he had so many friends—obsequious, flattering, cloying and supplicating friends. The Swiss Garden seemed to satisfy his mood completely. The hotel management hoped to make this roof the most popular spot in town by advertising it as the coolest: the gray dancing floor simulated a frozen lagoon; the booths were icicle-festooned igloos; a cigarette-girl moved from booth to booth clad in a fur-trimmed Eskimo suit of rippling white satin. This Eskimo seemed greatly to intrigue a sharp-nosed greasy-haired individual who was one of six squeezed into a booth with the six-foot pitcher of the Romans. He took a package of cigarettes from the girl's tray and pushed them toward the pretty little blonde who was crowded down beside Braley. At the same time his dark eyes glinted suspiciously.

"Have a fag, Fern?"

Her shining blue eyes returned his quick glare as if they were flint responding to

the contact of steel, but she only shook her head.

"What's the matter—swore off?" When Jake Bentley smiled, he displayed much bridge-work, and the sallow skin about his eyes wrinkled like a parched lemon; but there was seldom friendship in his smile, and just now there was only hostility, thinly veneered. He had introduced Ira Braley to Fern Deleroy soon after the Romans had come North, and he had done so for a purpose. Lately he had begun to suspect that Fern was double-crossing him; tonight his suspicions had become belief, and Fern, with the crisis imminent, had answered his challenge. She had refused to contribute her effulgence to the tinkling gayety of the roof-garden; she had not only ordered ginger ale for herself, but had insisted that the big young pitcher should pass up the silver flasks and their potions and subtly she had been tightening the strings about his purse. In a fashion that completely escaped the obtuse young celebrity, Fern and Jake Bentley had been staging a contest of wits.

"I guess my little Fern don't have to smoke if she don't want to, Jake," protested the ball-player in an affectionate growl. "Come on, let's dance."

"No, let's go home!" And Fern sprang up impatiently, billowing the crêpe dress that settled again like an orchid cloud about her. Jake Bentley's nostrils quivered, and his hands clenched beneath the table; the two other girls and the third man scowled resentfully, and Ira Braley looked at her in astonishment. Standing, her head was just on a level with his as he sat between her and the dancing floor vibrating now to shuffling feet.

"Come on, take me home."

"But I got to pay the check first."

"Let Jake—it's his turn."

Bentley breathed in sharply. "Sure, let me pay. . . . Good night, I forgot my wallet!"

"This will cover it." Braley dropped a bill on the plate and found himself literally pushed out of the booth. With her high heels clicking a swift tattoo and her head tilted toward the star-powdered sky, Fern hastened to the lift. Braley followed after, acutely conscious of his embarrassment. In the bronzed lift Fern appeared unaware of her escort's presence, and when they reached the lobby, she led him another chase across the tessellated floor and out to a taxicab. It was Fern who gave her apartment address.

The Roman pitcher slumped back on the cushions and yielded to the swaying of the cab, an adolescent sulkiness clouding the good-looking but not over-intelligent features, a firm chin, an impulsive mouth, a slightly tilted nose and frank, hazel-flecked eyes.

The girl sat on the edge of the seat and stared steadily out the window. Flashes from arc-lights or passing cars focused at times upon her and disclosed a childlike countenance suddenly matured. Fern likewise had come from a farm, but had acquired more sophistication in two years than Braley would ever achieve in a lifetime.

Braley looked at her yearningly as a light played upon her. The hair beneath the orchid hat was the color of his Iowa wheat; cosmetics had not yet supplanted a natural bloom.

"Sick?" he asked plaintively.

"You said it," she answered without turning her head. "Sick of life, sick of everything—and most of all, sick of you."

"Huh—so that's it! Tired of me, huh? Got some daddy with more sugar than I have! A twelve-thousand salary don't mean nothing to you, I guess." And then as she

sat unmoved, he complained with a catch in his voice: "Don't care for me no more."

She replied without turning: "It's because I *do* care—but you wouldn't understand, you boob!" Her eyes moistened and blinked here; her voice had a yearning note of affection to it that another might have caught; but Braley was only conscious of being called a boob.

Twenty-five years is still youth; and Braley had spent twenty of those years, and four winters besides, on a farm; but in the big leagues, where thirty becomes senility, twenty-five carries with it the mature respect of middle age. There were thousands who had eagerly shaken his hand and praised him, although this year when he had come North with a sore arm and had failed to go the distance in any game, compliments came less frequently, and even Manager Martin had waxed sarcastic of late. But none had ever before called him a boob.

"Guess you don't know who you are talking to—"

"Sure I do—the pitcher that's got more speed than Walter Johnson and a better curve than Dizzy Vance—"

"His name aint Dizzy—it's Dazzy."

"I don't care what his name is. I don't care for anything. Here's my stop, and I'm glad of it. Some day you'll wake up and know I'm the one that told you the truth. Jake Bentley and the rest can feed you applesauce, and you eat it up and pay their bills—"

"I spent plenty on you."

"Not half what you wanted to; and in one way or another I paid you for everything and I'm paying now, paying with my heart—oh, but you don't know what I'm raving about. I'm a boob too. We're both a couple of hicks from the farms. The rest you meet wont be so easy on you or your pocketbook—and you'll like 'em a hell of a lot more than you do me! Let me out of here."

GRAVE in dignity, Braley opened the door for her, tipped his hat and gave an address to the driver. The car shot away. Fern did not turn to look after it as she entered the apartment building; her high heels clicked in staccato, her head she held erect; only the corners of her mouth yielded to her emotions with a slight quivering. But once in her room, she sagged like a wilted orchid; tears filled the limpid eyes and flowed over, and then she did

that which no gold-digger is supposed to be guilty of—she threw herself on a sofa and cried over a man.

IRA BRALEY reported at the Romans' park the next day in a surly mood induced by late hours and injured pride. Unfortunately he found his manager in a similar mood.

"Gonna pitch you today," announced Martin, the sting of recent defeats reflected in his tone. "Can you go the distance?"

"If I've worked the soreness out of my shoulder," grumbled the big twirler.

"Ever try sleep for it? Or maybe the doctors up at the Swiss Garden advise cocktails for it."

Braley flushed but did not answer, for repartee was not an accomplishment of his.

"Listen, Braley: your first couple of seasons with us you were just a big kid from Iowa. Then you won twenty-eight games and hung up a strike-out record, and after that you'd listen to anyone who told you how good you were, so that now those who can tell you something can't—if you know what I mean. This year you haven't shown speed enough to break a window. Take away your swift, and you got nothing else."

"It's only a sore arm," complained Braley as he impatiently sought to break away, but Martin held him.

"There's sore arms and sore arms. Doolley's been a trainer for nearly twenty years, and he says yours is the kind that don't come back."

"He's crazy."

"Maybe; but I wouldn't want Cousins to get the same idea."

Braley started his fifth game that afternoon and heard the fans calling for his departure as early as the fourth inning. In the sixth he saw Martin call in young Wenzer from the bull-pen. The manager permitted Braley to pick up his maroon sweater and head for the showers without speaking to him.

Opinions are arrived at suddenly but decisively by baseball fandom. For them Braley was done, and the Romans had discovered a new star in Wenzer. This transition was just as definite as a change of slides upon a lecture-screen, and was accepted by everyone but Braley.

"You'd better win today," was the succinct injunction Martin gave Braley the next time he went into the box.

Braley went to the mound, his eyes hard

set as he stood there, a superbly built athlete in his clean white uniform. Time was when his appearance brought forth cheers, or at least that unmistakable warmth of inspiration and encouragement that every performer craves from an audience, but now he sensed hostility; and out in center field, where the announcer was megaphoning the batteries, he could hear the ribald greetings to his name. Mob adoration had been the sweetest thing in life for this farmer boy, but now his ears burned with intense resentment toward all humanity. There had been a time also when opposing batters came to the plate with a desperate determination that partly destroyed their effectiveness; now the very first batter nonchalantly stepped into a pitch and cracked it on a line to left field. An out and another ringing single put men on first and third, but a sharp double play saved Braley that inning.

The Romans scored twice in their half, but the Blues in turn pushed over a brace of counters on two hard singles and a double that struck high on the left-field barrier. Braley escaped danger in the third and fourth when outfielders gathered in wicked smashes, but in the fifth came the deluge. Three singles filled the sacks and loosened the tongues of the fans. The Roman infield gathered about Braley, but resentment smoldered beneath the thin veneer of sympathy.

Big Hank Garland pounded his first baseman's glove. "Settle down, Ira. You got the pitcher up now, and if he ever got a hit with men on base, he'd faint."

"We'll be layin' back for a double in case he *should* hit it," snapped Crab Haley.

Braley gripped the new white ball in fear and resentment, and as he sought to put everything into a fast one, he prayed for the hop that had deserted him. A streak of white shot for the plate, and the pitcher swung. A roar of mingled dismay and disgust rose from the fans as Carrington sought to return the ball to the infield to keep as many as possible of the fleeting runners from scoring.

The roar of an angry crowd pounded in Braley's ears; through brimming eyes he saw Martin step from the dugout and petulantly call Wenzer in from the pen.

Braley and Wenzer passed on the white line that marked the limits of the diamond. They moved in opposite directions—one toward the open mound, the other toward the enveloping dugout—one toward fame,



They moved in opposite directions—one toward fame, the other toward oblivion.



the other toward oblivion. Wenzer strode with head erect, Braley with head bowed and shoulders drooping. For Wenzer there were cheers of encouragement, for Braley the silence of renunciation. The fans, already erasing Braley from their memories, were giving him the cold shoulder.

Braley slept poorly that night and the next morning went down early for his paper, a sense of guilt replacing the usual air of expecting homage. He waited until he had slipped into a corner of the lobby out of sight of all who might be passing into the dining-room and there opened to the sporting sheet.

"BRALEY SUSPENDED BY THE ROMANS FOR FAILURE TO GET INTO CONDITION."

The big pitcher stared long at the statement without anger; he was wounded too deeply for such an emotion just then. He felt intensely the weight of the last six words. In that phrase, "for failure to get into condition" was proclaimed an outrageous calumny, for not one who read it but would attribute his loss of effectiveness to a wild life of dissipation.

Eventually Braley went into the dining-room, feeling conscious of change in the attitude of the waiters and regular guests—intangible, but as certain as a forty-degree drop in temperature.

Rain brought an early cancellation of the next day's game, but Braley received a summons to the Roman executive's office. All players disliked to come in contact with the owner of the Romans. A year ago, armed with the weight of hero-worship, Braley had bearded Cousins in his den and forced a twelve-thousand-dollar contract from him. Today, when Braley stood before his employer, his big form drooping beneath an olive slicker, conditions were reversed: Cousins now had the weight of opinion behind him. His countenance was the inevitable frigid mask, his eyes as cold and as hard as blue tur-

quoises, as they fastened on his high-salaried property.

"I'm giving you the ten days' notice you are entitled to. We obtained waivers. No one wants to gamble on a twelve-thousand-dollar contract and a cold shoulder. Your only alternative is to take a new contract, three years at five thousand, and remain suspended without pay until you get in condition."

"I'll let you know," mumbled Braley. The owner's unjust terms added to a sense of injury so acute that it stifled anger, and Braley wanted to be angry when he treated with Cousins; he wished to argue.

That night Braley called up Jake Bentley, affecting cheerfulness.

"Lo, Jake! What's on t'night?"

"Sorry, Ira," came the hesitant voice. "I have something fixed for tonight, something special."

"Yeah? Well, listen, Jake—when can I see you? I'm kind of flat and—"

"Sorry, Ira, but I'm strapped myself, and I gotta go out of town for a few days."

Jake Bentley wasn't the only friend he had. He called them in turn; but while their excuses differed in form they all achieved the same purpose. Braley continued calling like a poker-player fascinated by run of bad cards, but in the end he tired and stood there alone in his room

opening and shutting his hands. He was the loneliest man in all the world.

Then he threw himself across the bed, mumbling: "I'm sick of life, sick of everything."

He recalled abruptly that he had spoken the sentiments of Fern Deleroy, and in thinking of her, his depression yielded to resentment. He pictured himself retaliating. He saw himself famous again, engaged to some fair movie queen and coldly passing the dejected Fern with a glance that told her how much she had missed by deserting him when he had been dropped by the Romans. But he found something wrong in the technic of this gloomy picture. Fern had broken with him before his suspension; and she might even be ignorant of the suspension itself. More than once she had hurt his pride by disclosing that the sporting-pages held little appeal for her, and he had failed to see the compliment—that where others applauded him for what he did, she had found him interesting for himself alone. He realized that before he could flout her with his movie queen fiancée he would have to connect their break with his suspension. He could do this by inviting her out for the evening, only to have her refuse to have anything to do with him.

EIGHT o'clock found the stern-faced Braley at Fern's apartment. "Ira," he announced into the tube, and was summoned upstairs.

Fern opened the door for him, and surveyed him with questioning eyes after the fashion of a mother searching a son's countenance.

"Lo, Fern. Want to go out for the evening?"

"No." It was just the answer he expected, and he stiffened. "I want you to come in." He relaxed and looked at her in surprise. "Come in," she repeated, and stepped aside.

He followed her into the room and obediently sat down on a sofa. His weight depressed the cushions so that when she sat down, she slid close to him. She kept her face averted, as she usually did with him; he seldom saw more than that piquant profile that looked out with something of a desperate courage from beneath the waving golden tresses. A delicate perfume intrigued him, and he felt again his great longing for her and a tragic sense of loss.

"Well, I was wondering when you would find out you needed me."

"Needed you?" He looked at her in surprise.

"Who else have you got? Jake and the rest come to your help? Not much. Now you know what a boob you've been."

This was the second time she had called him a boob, but now he hung his head in confession. Her voice softened.

"We're both boobs, the same kind. Maybe that's why I fell so hard for you." He looked up, tingling with surprise, but she pressed his hand and went on. "We're both a couple of hicks from the farm who didn't know when we were well off. I wanted to come to the city, to knock 'em dead from behind the footlights. Then I found out what you had to pay to get a chance; and I found out what the mob was like you had to do your stuff for—no heart at all. The men are pigs and the women worse." Her hand clenched over his until the knuckles showed white through the pink skin.

"It's nobody's business what I did since—except maybe yours."

He shook his head. "I don't want to know nothing—never."

"I kinda thought you was like that, Ira. Guess that's another reason I fell for you. Well, I got by; men are boobs—wise boobs, not your kind. You're just a simple boob. But I'm sick of it all. I used to think having to stay on a farm was the next place to hell, but now I want to go back and raise things—hens and kids. That's where we belong, Ira."

"It costs money to buy a farm, a good farm."

"They got all your dough, huh? Well, I got some stuff of yours, bracelets, rings—"

"Nix. Those were presents."

"Maybe you thought so. They were loans—but I'd kinda like to keep the diamond for an engagement ring. Aint there anything coming to you from the ball-club?"

"No—I'm suspended without pay, just as if it was my fault my arm went cold. It's a one-way proposition. They still own me in case they can sell me, but I don't get a cent."

Fern tilted her head belligerently. "If they are going to keep any rights in you, they got to pay for them."

He shook his head patiently. "You don't understand baseball law."

"I don't want to, but I got some rights

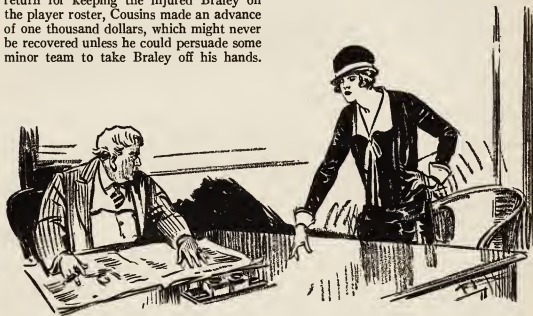
in you myself now, and I mean to tell that owner of yours something."

Owner Cousins had dealt with ball-players often and successfully—resentful, obstinate and infuriated ball-players; but having to discuss salary matters with an insistent woman was a new experience, and the callous owner came off second best. In return for keeping the injured Braley on the player roster, Cousins made an advance of one thousand dollars, which might never be recovered unless he could persuade some minor team to take Braley off his hands.

new treatment found a ready victim in Braley.

Fern protested only mildly. Marriage had given Braley some of the ascendancy due a husband, and he had compromised to the extent of getting a little place for the summer out in the suburbs.

"When the fall comes, we'll go West



Having to discuss salary matters with an insistent woman was a new experience.

Braley was overjoyed at the news. "That means more than you think," he explained to Fern. "The Romans ought to finish one-two-three, and that makes me eligible for a cut at the World Series money."

THE Braleys' honeymoon was of brief duration and ended back in the city instead of some Iowa farm. Ira Braley was tractable, but obstinate in his own way. The best time to pick up a farm was in the winter, he insisted, and they might as well stick around the city where he could obtain some extra money pitching "semi-pro" under another name. But behind Braley's excuses for not leaving the vicinity of the Roman baseball park was his faith in his ability to come back and his burning desire to turn the tables on all those who had tumbled him from his once lofty pedestal. He had heard of a Dr. Kessner who could perform wonders with sore arms. Dr. Kessner got considerable of his money without working any benefit; but there were others. Each new quack offering a

and pick up a place cheap. If the Romans cop the pennant, we'll get a nice piece of change, Baby. Who knows? I may yet be the means of winning it for 'em. I was talking to a feller today who was telling me about a doctor what's got a machine that's something like an X-ray—"

But the Romans appeared to be doing very well without the services of Ira Braley. Young Wenzler, with his baffling southpaw assortment, had become the new sensation to monopolize the spotlight. Braley's name never figured in the sport columns, and when a public performer vanishes from the news pages his ostracism is complete.

As the summer advanced, Ira began to show the strain caused by his obsession, a strain that communicated itself to Fern. The suburban life had helped him physically, keeping him in condition and hardening the flesh on his strong frame, but it neither cured his arm nor deprived him of his confidence.

"I can't burn 'em over—haven't the old swift yet," he explained to Fern the day

he proudly brought her down to the barn and showed her the target he had painted on the door.

"I can work out my arm gradually, and I can practice control," he explained. "That's all a lot of 'em got. Look at Bailey and Williams and a bunch of 'em—just control and a change of pace."

FERN made no comment, and neither did she make complaint as patiently day after day this forgotten celebrity pathetically lobbed a ball at the painted target and prayed for that old-time speed that had won him national renown in a ball park just a few miles away. Through the papers and the radio he followed the progress of the season's race that in his league had narrowed to a battle between the Romans and the Grays.

"If this old arm was in shape, we'd walk away from them Grays. They was always suckers for me." He would tell this to his patient young wife, a dreamy look in his blue eyes as he glanced up from a paper spread on the kitchen table, or removed the earphones after listening to the broadcasted scores. "Maybe the arm will work out in time for me to get 'em that pennant, and when I do, maybe I wont give them fans the cold shoulder!"

But the arm didn't work out. Apparently Braley had everything as he worked down by the barn; but his shoulder remained "frozen," and he couldn't get his speed into the pitch. And the Romans won the pennant without his assistance.

The papers were flooded with expert articles on the World Series and Braley avidly devoured each word. One morning after breakfast he let out a war-whoop that startled Fern into dropping the dish she was wiping.

"Listen to this!" he exclaimed: "'Strange as it may seem, the dope gives the Owls a decided advantage over the Romans in pitching despite the records of Koster, Williams and Wenzer of the Roman staff. Koster and Wenzer are both southpaws, and Williams is primarily a slow-ball pitcher. The Owls can present a line-up with nine men batting right handed, and have lost but three games all season to port siders, while pitchers in their own league resembling Williams have been harshly treated by the Owls. The Romans will sadly miss Ira Braley. Braley, backed by the support the Romans could give him, might win two or even three games.' That

guy is dead right!" exclaimed Braley. "You can't fool the Owls with freak stuff. You got to give 'em speed like I got—or had. If I can only get it back!"

But the World Series started with Ira's shoulder just as cold as ever, and he himself apparently forgotten by the thousands who tried to jam their way into the Roman park for the first game. Ira was not one of these. He obtained his report of the game by the radio, bemoaning his absence when the Romans fell behind and discounting the luck that enabled the Romans to pull the game out of the fire in the eighth inning when Garland dropped a ball into the extra seats in right field for a home run with two on.

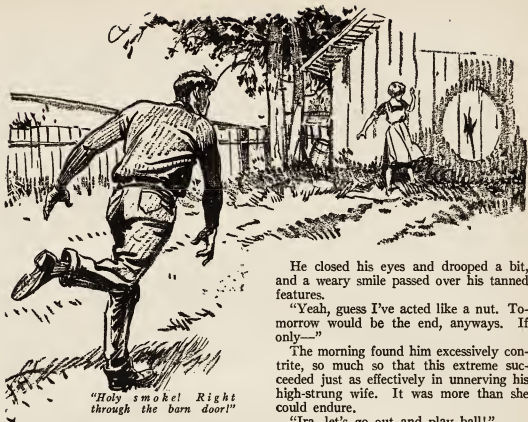
The next day Martin sent in the veteran Williams against the Owls, and the broadcasted report told Braley that the over-anxious Owls were popping the ball into the air. Once again home runs favored the Romans and gave them a lead of five runs. In the fifth the Owls found Williams for two counters, and he was replaced in the sixth with the bases filled and one run over the plate. The relief pitcher retired the side. The Owls tied the score in the eighth but the Romans won the game in the ninth. The Romans had a two-game lead for the series, but as far as actual playing was concerned, the advantage had all been with the Owls. Fortuitous home runs had swung both games.

The two teams went west, where the Romans put over the third win in a ten-inning game and astonished the country. Experts were predicting a four-game series and bitterly assailing the Owls' strategy board. But many dissented from the general opinion, including Ira Braley.

"Those Owls aint done yet," he predicted. "I never expected 'em to lose the first three games, but they got the pitchers. They'll kill young Wenzer the next time they face him, and Williams too. As for Koster, he threw so many curves his first game he'll need a week to be right again. I could clinch that title for 'em now. Gee, if my arm was only better!"

Braley went down to the barn, a pitiful figure, tossing a soiled ball at the painted target.

JUST as Braley predicted, the Owls pounced on Wenzer and drove him from the box in three innings, and clinched an easy victory. The following day they



came back to the Romans' park and administered a similar punishment to Williams. The baseball world began to sit up and decide it was a series after all. Koster pitched well for the Romans in the sixth game, but tired in the seventh and saw the Owls push over the runs that tied the series at three games. The Roman staff was shot to pieces, and the Owls had Wilson, their best pitcher, available for the seventh game. And now the fickle public acclaimed Lowery as the genius.

Martin had done his best with his staff. How often he must have longed for Ira Braley and his old-time speed; but Braley was a dozen miles from the park and minus his speed. That night before the final game, which was also to be played in the Roman park, found Braley sitting on the edge of his bed, the electric light still glaring while he rubbed liniment into his right shoulder.

"Gee, why can't I get into shape?" he moaned.

"Oh, Ira, for heaven's sake!"

The startled Braley saw his wife sitting up in the bed, her eyes hysterically wide.

"What's the matter?"

"You're drivin' me insane with that arm of yours—all summer long."

He closed his eyes and drooped a bit, and a weary smile passed over his tanned features.

"Yeah, guess I've acted like a nut. Tomorrow would be the end, anyways. If only—"

The morning found him excessively contrite, so much so that this extreme succeeded just as effectively in unnerving his high-strung wife. It was more than she could endure.

"Ira, let's go out and play ball!"

Her cheerfulness as much as her suggestion mystified him, though she did not attempt to explain, but bundled him into his maroon sweater and handed him glove and ball.

The chill of the October morning was still in the air when they reached the barn; and where Braley had made his pitcher's box, there lay a white breath of frost not yet vanquished by the ascending sun. Sometimes in the past Fern had stood by her husband's target and had entered into the spirit of the game by pretending to be certain batters he named. She assumed the part now without bidding and posed as the various Owls mentioned.

"Now you're La Rue. . . . What's Murph calling for? A strike, broke right across the pan." Fern tossed the ball back again. "What's he want now? A fast one—watch this."

He simulated a terrifying wind-up, only to slip on the frosted grass and fall in a tangled heap. Fern commenced to laugh, but as she saw the anguish in her husband's distorted features, her laugh froze on her lips.

"What happened—oh, what happened?" she cried as she rushed to him.

"My arm—I heard something snap in my shoulder."

"It's broken?"

"No, but it's gone for good. It'll never come back now."

"Oh, Ira." The knowledge that nothing serious had happened reacted and released her hysteria once again. Ira jumped up.

"Sorry, Fern. Meant to forget about the ol' arm. They never come back, anyway." The baseball, visible symbol of all his trouble, lay at his feet. Forgetting entirely the injury to his arm, he stopped and retrieved it and hurled it with all his strength toward a distant copse of woods. And now his eyes seemed literally to follow the ball. The next instant he sprang after it.

"Fern, help me find that ball!" he tossed over his shoulder.

When his wife reached him, she found him beating about the brush like a wild man. "I got to find that ball, I got to. Did you see me throw it? My arm didn't snap out—it snapped *back!*"

FERN found the ball, but he snatched it from her and ran back to the barn. When she again came up to him, he was standing before the target with the ball clutched to his breast, and he was trembling. An unaccountable accident had robbed him of his speed; now, at the last moment, had a compensating accident given back to him his skill? He had but to throw the ball to know his answer—and he was afraid.

"Throw it, Ira."

He turned a pitiful glance toward her. It was she who was calm now. He threw timidly and without speed—and without pain. He threw again and again, with greater effort, with increasing speed and confidence until the ball whanged against the barn door with resounding smacks.

"Did you see the hop on that last one? Just like the old days, and I aint used half my smoke. Watch this."

He wound up and shot his whole body into the pitch, and the ball streaked for the target; there came a resounding whack, followed by a ripping sound as a board split and the ball dropped through the hole. Braley gazed at the damage with open mouth.

"Holy smoke! Right through the barn door! Wait till I tell Martin that." He looked suddenly at his wife. "Fern, ring up Dave Wilkins and get him to drive us into town. I'll give him anything if he gets us in by one o'clock."

It was just about one o'clock when Braley became disgusted with the traffic jam in the vicinity of the Roman park. With his old sweater, battered glove and shoes under his arm, and his pretty wife trying to keep up with him, he forced a way to the players' entrance. He scarcely spoke to the surprised attendant as he brushed by with his wife. Ignoring the ushers, he led Fern down to the manager's box, hastily introduced her to Martin's better half, and then departed abruptly for the dressing-rooms.

"Hey, Bill, I've come back." He leaned against the door and grinned.

"What do you mean, you've come back?" demanded Martin.

"I mean I got the old swift—put a ball through a barn door. I'm in condition, too, and I have been practicing control all summer. I can win that game today, Bill. I was *meant* to win it; that's why the ol' arm came back."

Defeat, like death, sometimes precedes itself. The Romans were already reconciled to the loss of the game and series; their dispirited countenances reflected as much, and as they dressed, they mentally discounted from intended purchases the difference between the winner and loser share of the purse. They looked upon the advent of Braley without awakened hope, considering him a nut, or just one more who would cut into the funds he had done nothing to earn.

"I'm tellin' you the truth, Bill," insisted Braley as he read disbelief in the manager's face. "Gimme a ball, gimme Murph, and I'll show you."

A moment later Braley's trembling fingers were putting on a uniform.

BUT Martin didn't dare start Braley. He couldn't risk the deluge of criticism that would descend upon him, should disaster follow the starting of a man who had been out of competitive pitching all season. He sent in young Wenzer while Braley warmed up beneath the stands with a substitute catcher. Before long he heard the ringing crack of bats, the howls of those who had followed the Owls, and the groans of the home rooters. Braley pitched all the harder.

A moment later Martin came running under the stands.

"Get in there, Braley, before I drop dead."

"Any runs scored yet?"

"No, but they got the sacks loaded and only one out."

The fans saw Wenzer leave the box on signal, and they looked vainly toward left-field for the relief pitcher. Then they saw a tall, broad-shouldered athlete in white uniform step from the Romans' dugout. The two pitchers passed on the foul-lines, just as they had months before, going in opposite directions; but it was Wenzer who now hung his head, and Braley who stepped confidently.

Braley almost reached the mound before he was recognized, and then the silent park resounded to a roar like a blast of an explosion as they voiced their surprise and their hope born of this dramatic return of the forgotten idol. The blast shook Braley, but then he stiffened; he owed these people nothing but that same cold shoulder they had given him. What did they think he was?

The Owls had also been affected by the dramatic entrance of the speed-ball artist; their superb confidence weakened. Lowery ran protesting to the umpires, but Martin answered all his arguments and proved Braley to be in good standing.

Braley proceeded to burn the ball across the rubber.

HAMMOND, the Owls' slugger, stepped confidently to the plate with the sacks loaded, but his confidence was as nothing compared to Braley's. The ball sped to the exact spot chosen by Braley; Hammond never moved, and the umpire called a strike. The fans applauded. When Hammond swung viciously beneath a hop, the stands howled delight. Braley gave him two balls and then fooled him with his fast-breaking curves. The next Owl popped one off the handle, and Garland gathered it in at first and retired the side.

Probably the park had never witnessed such sustained applause as greeted Braley as he went to the bench. He stubbornly refused to remove his hat, but as he neared the dugout the applause became louder. The corners of his mouth twitched and suddenly his face broke into a smile—and his hat came off.

Frequently the final game of a series produces all sorts of slugging, but today's game became a pitcher's battle. Wilson, for the Owls, pitched in perfect shape, while Braley breezed the ball across in old-time form. Inning after inning went into baseball history until the last of the

ninth found Braley leading off. He had never been a good batter, and had struck out and fouled off to the catcher on his two previous trips to the plate.

As Braley stood at the plate, he pondered over the beautiful possibilities of winning the game with a homer. It was possible; the right field stands were closer now—a good fly and he could drop the ball in there. But Braley made the mistake of taking his eyes from the pitcher to look at the spot where he meant to drive his homer. Too late he saw the ball coming for him. He tried to get out of the way, but barely ducked his head. The ball struck him a glancing blow, knocking off his cap, and he went down like a log.

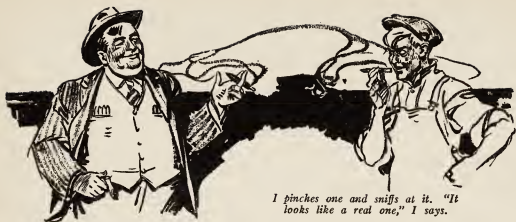
He was unhurt—merely frightened; but as he heard the groans of dismay, he stayed down, playing for sympathy as the players gathered about him. Then he remembered Fern. She had been nervous all day. He leaped up and trotted toward first as the fans shouted with relief.

He took a good lead off first and slid into second on a sacrifice, only to see the next batter fly out to the infield. But Carrington caught hold of one and whistled it over short. Braley tore for third and home, running as he never had before in his life. He rounded third and heard Martin drive him on. He saw the Owl catcher waiting at the plate, body tense, eyes staring, his face dust-streaked with the marks of the mask pads upon it; he could follow the ball by the eyes of this catcher and knew it to be close. He heard it bound behind him, and he leaped into the air, throwing his body wide. His foot hit the rubber as the catcher plunged the ball into his back. He couldn't tell which sensation preceded the other.

Braley glanced fearfully up at the umpire and saw his hands spread wide. His heart sank as he mistook the sign for the moment. But he had scored. The Romans had won!

Dejectedly the Owl catcher put the ball into the hands of Wilson and commiserated with him, but Braley saw them for but a moment. His own team had pounced upon him. Fans poured out of the stands. Police fought to restrain them, but failed. Braley found himself lifted on a sea of shoulders and paraded before the stands while the fickle thousands unblushingly paid homage to the hero.

Only one pair of swimming blue eyes saw Ira Braley for the child he was.



The New Idea Cigar

Wherein an intrepid garage mechanic undertakes to make common or garden lettuce into cigar tobacco—and many other extraordinary things transpire.

By CALVIN BALL

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

I BEEN claiming a long time that a woman never knows much about business, and I still claim it, because when a woman has got money in the bank at maybe four per cent, she will usually insist to leave it there and add more to it; while on the other hand, as the saying is, you can't accumulate unless you speculate, and it takes a man to know it.

I had a good many arguments with Caroline on this subject. She has got a shrewd head on her in some matters and has already agreed she will marry me; but whenever I suggest to her that time is dragging along and if we're ever going to have enough to start up a household with furniture, we got to do better than four per cent, she only shrugs up her shoulders and looks at me, and says maybe later on we'll get four and a half.

"The money is safe," she says, "and that's the main point, considering what might happen to it if somebody who doesn't know much begins investing it."

"Who are you hinting doesn't know much, Caroline?" I says.

"I don't mean anyone special," she answers. "It's only an example. A general

rule for people to follow if they want to get ahead is: work steady and save steady, and keep your thoughts on the garage instead of these get-rich schemes you're always thinking up. And I can tell by looking at you, you got a new one."

Caroline didn't have any foundation for saying I have got a new scheme; but at the same time, as she's a daughter of the garage-owner who hires me, and I live with them, she has plenty chance to watch me and maybe knew that I was looking regular through the Junction City *Journal* want ad's. It was a couple days later when a ad caught my eye that I answered. I didn't tell Caroline I answered it.

THE address I wrote to was "Mr. Sam Muldoon, Box W, Junction City," and as I never before heard of anybody named Muldoon living in this section, I mentioned the fact to him in my letter, telling him that on account he's a stranger, he would have to give reference, and I also mentioned in a frank way that I don't play the easy-mark game for other people, so if it's anything to bite on, keep away. What I'm looking for, I writes, is a good invest-

ment for a thousand dollars, where I can double it without waiting too long, instead of four per cent as at present; and if you have got such a plan, which I am doubtful that you have got it, but if you have as you claim you have, per ad, then I am open to hear about it.

It was Monday morning when Muldoon finally appears at the garage, and through the window I sizes him up while he's climbing out the flivver. He didn't have any flower pinned on his coat and wasn't so flashy-looking as the double-your-money aluminum mine gent that went through recent, and also it gives me confidence when I sees he's a fat one. From experience I trust a fat man farther than a long thin one, and it's like the boss often says, it takes a fat man to make the money and a skinny one to skin him out of it.

I watches Muldoon close while he's walking up to the door, and from the way he's roving his eyes over the premises, he's also doing some sizing up. When he walks in, he stops for a second inside looking around, and spotting me, comes forward in a breezy way, his right hand stretched out while he's still halfway across the room, and a smile on him like a salesman.

"This must be Ed," he says, booming his voice. "The boys in the Metro Pool-room described you, and I couldn't make a mistake." By this time he has got a hold of my hand and is working things like it's a family reunion. "Muldoon is my name," he continues, "and I'm pleased to meet you and get this opportunity for a interview. You got a nice highway shop here; you the owner?"

While he's still talking, I edges him over to where there's a couple benches we could use for chair purposes, and in the meantime was still using my eyes, noticing his clothes looked of good quality, except his heels are a little run down; and his watch-charm is a rabbit's foot, and the hard derby he's wearing moves up and down when he talks.

"I'm not the owner," I says to him at last. "I'm the mechanic like I believe was mentioned in my letter, but run the shop while the boss is gone."

"Aha, I see," Muldoon answers; "and he's not here at present?"

"He's in Junction City for a few hours," I says. "The fact about me being a mechanic on low wages is the reason why I need more money, and this ad of yours was what I was looking for, except I don't yet

know the details, and that's what I want to hear."

While talking, I digs up the ad that was cut out and folded in my pocket; and I spreads it out where he could see and watches him glance over it.

Wanted—Young man, hustler, in or near Junction City, having small sum to invest in honest enterprise through which money will be doubled in thirty days. For details address Sam Muldoon, Box W, Junction City.

Muldoon didn't give it more than a swift look, and then turns to me.

"Of course this ad don't mean much," he says. "It's only an introduction method to get acquainted with the right party, and what you want is the details, which I can give them to you in short order. It's a bigger kind of project than the ad looks like, and a good deal more money in it."

SLIDING back on the bench I fumbles for a cheroot. I like a good thing and am always ready to snap at quick money, so I waited to hear about this.

"A tobacco expert is what I am," he explains, "and it brings us to the point when I remind you that a ordinary cigar sells for a dime to fifteen cents, when it ought to sell for a nickel."

"I admit this," I says.

He leans back and shoves up the front end of the derby.

"In the past, Ed, there's been only one kind of material for cigars, and they've always been made out of tobacco, haven't they?"

"They claim it," I agrees.

"There was nothing else suitable to make them of, and that's the reason. But like all other lines of industry, a revolution must come soon or late, and having carried on experiments for some time, I have at last hit on a formula—and don't doubt this, because I'll prove it—a formula where common lettuce-leaves, after going through a certain solution process, will toughen, thin out, take on color, and make as good a cigar as ever sold for a dime, maybe even fifteen. A non-tobacco cigar, and made pure from leaves of lettuce."

He stops talking, and for a few seconds I sits there puffing at the cheroot and watching him as close as he's watching me.

"It sounds pretty good so far," I says at last. "You sure they haven't been doing this right along?"

"It is unheard of to date. We got a vir-

gin field and a formula that I can guarantee, and if we start talking business, I don't expect you to put up a penny till you've tested the formula thorough, and made a full batch out of your own garden. And before we go farther, I'll ask you to put down what you're smoking, and light this sample."

When he pushes his coat back I see a row of cigars in his vest pocket. He slips a few of them out and hands them to me.

They were regular size and color, and while I don't set up to be a judge except of cheroot brands, these looked like a high price and I got to admit they had a finish on them as smooth as any ten-center you could find. I pinches one and sniffs at it, and the more I examines it, the more it looked like genuine tobacco. I certainly gives it a close inspection.

"It looks like a real one," I says.

"It's better than real, and healthier," he tells me, and strikes up a match. "Give it good light and a fair trial, and if it smokes like fifteen cents, we'll be ready to talk business details, and prove to you that you can make them yourself and not a leaf of tobacco in them."

BY the time Muldoon has finished giving me the facts and figures of how he can produce these cigars for less than two cents each, rolled and boxed as he says, I had the sample smoked to the final half-inch and there's no question about was it worth the money. It was Grade A, but it looked too much like real tobacco instead of lettuce leaves, and as I didn't see him make it and only had his word that it came out of a garden, I wasn't jumping at decisions. If it's made like he claims, this formula of his was a knockout, but when I was trying to pin him down with questions, he sidetracks me in a way I didn't like, jumping from one point to another of his story, and when he give me a straight answer now and then I noticed he had a nervous way of strumming his fingers or pulling at the rabbit-foot charm, like there's a lot of hard thinking going on in the background.

"That's a fair question," he says to me when I asks him how he happens to be in Junction City. "I want a young man like you because you are well known local. I've been on the road selling cigars, and know the market. This is a prosperous territory through here, and it's a ideal location to start such a plan in a small way, as there's plenty cigar smokers and plenty lettuce."

"That's a good combination," I says. "You figuring to tell people what they're made of?"

"We don't have to fool the public about what we're doing. We advertise the facts that it's a healthy smoke, and explain what's in them, except the formula is a secret. And the formula is so simple it will surprise you—molasses, coffee, water, soda, and in fact it's all simple things but one. This is the essence that I don't tell how it's made. A bottle like that is enough for a hundred pounds."

From an inside pocket he's fished out a small bottle of something brown which, figuring from the other things he mentioned, it might be sirup. I takes it and looks at it, and finally smells of it.

"Put a little on your finger," he says, "and taste it."

"Later on I'll try it more thorough," I tells him. "I got lettuce back in the garden—how long does it take for me to make a batch?"

He begins pulling at the rabbit charm.

"That's the point I'm getting at. We'll start a batch today if you want to before I leave, and six days is plenty for it to stand. It'll be ready for rolling by the end of the week, and up to then we wont talk about investing money. When you see it for yourself is time enough, and it shows I got confidence. Meanwhile I'll boom them up around Junction City, and I'm the one that knows how."

Before Muldoon leaves, he gets into details far enough to suggest a name that he says we'll copyright and call them the New Idea Cigar, and I suggests calling them the Home Talent Brand, but he didn't like it, so I gives him his way; and after we agreed about it, he went ahead and showed me how the special solution is made. As there's nothing for me to lose by trying it, even being doubtful like I was, I roots up lettuce from the patch in back, and mixes things like he directs, using a small amount of essence, and finally seals the batch in six glass jars, which after Muldoon's gone I takes them upstairs to my room and puts three of them on a shelf.

THE proposition from the start sounded a little fishy to me, but if he's out to do me up in the bank-account he's made a mistake. What went in was lettuce, and what has got to come out, I figures, is something so close to tobacco that it will fool me when I roll it and smoke it.

*"Look at here, Caroline,"
I says, "it's getting so you
know more about what
I'm doing than I know
myself."*



It was in the forenoon that I had this talk with Muldoon, and it wasn't till along late in the afternoon that the boss gets back from Junction City, with Caroline also, as she was in town with him; and when I sees them getting out the flivver I has a kind of odd feeling that something has happened. Caroline's eyes was already on the shop like she's looking for me.

When they comes in the front door, Caroline starts in at once. I stands there blinking, but it didn't take long before I gets the drift of what's wrong.

Muldoon, I makes out, has not spent the day loafing, but has been circulating through Junction City doing some high-power talking that must have been a corker. He's been in poolrooms, restaurants and barber-shops, from what Caroline says, spreading the news in his boomer voice about the New Idea Cigar made out of lettuce and no tobacco, and telling them that their own local young man is the live wire who is doing it. If she wasn't stretching the truth, he's spread my name over the town like a circus, and I'm the side-show, giving me credit that I am the one who is

at the bottom of it, and I discovered the formula, and it's my plan, and my cigars, and if they want to see somebody who is a go-getter, I am the one to look at.

"Why don't you say something?" she says to me finally. "Is this all you can do, stand and look?"

"It's all I got a chance to do," I says, "and if Muldoon is any better at the talking profession than certain other parties I know, he must be a expert and no mistake."

"So you know Muldoon?" the boss interrupts.

I turns around so I'm facing him instead of Caroline, as I'd rather talk to somebody where there's a chance of saying something.

"Look at here, Herman," I says to the boss; "I am not denying about I know Muldoon, and also we've been talking this morning about the cigar plan, but I am not responsible that he is hollering these facts around Junction City and didn't tell him to do it, and didn't know he was going to."

"He admits it," Caroline jumps in, "and I knew from the first it's the truth." Caroline was looking at me like a iceberg.

"Is it a law against doing something where you can make money?" I demands. "I didn't think it up in the first place, because Muldoon is the one who put a ad in the paper, and what I am is a partner."

"You mean you let this cuckoo talk you into such a deal?" Herman speaks up.

"He is not a cuckoo," I says, "and I wouldn't say so anyhow until I see for a fact whether these things can be made like he claims they can. I am not a easy-marker to invest money until I know where I am at, and that must be what Caroline

is worrying over, and I have already got a batch of this new discovery made for a test, and when I open it and see good results is when we will then talk about investment."

"Ed," Herman says to me, "you fall for every swindle agent which comes through, and if this bird isn't one of them, I have lost good judgment."

"If he's not a crook," Caroline wedges in, "then he certainly has got wheels running in his head, and he looks like it anyhow, because cigars out of cabbage would be a miracle that nobody ever heard of yet, and when he's telling Junction City that you are the one who is doing it, what are they going to think?"

With Caroline interrupting, it takes me a quarter-hour to explain the details of what Muldoon has said, and what kind of a formula he has got, and also I later brings down one of the jars and describes to them how it's made. When they find out I haven't spent a penny on it except molasses they should of got quiet, but they still insist that it's a fraud somewhere and the safe policy for me is to drop it.

When I takes the jar of New Idea back to the room, my thoughts was whirling fast. This talking Muldoon was doing in Junction City was something I didn't like, but on the other hand, I remembers what he said about advertising and building up a market. Also he said something to me about the cigar would go better if it was backed by somebody local who was well known. Sizing him up like I did in the morning, it looked pretty sure to me that he wasn't a crook type, and if this mixture is a fake, there's only one thing left which could be wrong with him, and that's cuckoo like Herman said. He acted like a nervous one, and when I gets to thinking of it, I remembers a good many little things that was kind of odd, such as the rambling way he sometimes talked, and besides this, it still looked queer that he has to drag such a scheme out in the middle of Iowa to work it. When he left, he says he'd be back early the next morning; and I decides when he does come, to watch this weasel close.

The next day Muldoon fails to show up as promised but by talking on the phone with parties I know in town, I finds out he's been roving over the business section talking loud and hard about the New Idea Cigar. From what they tell me, he's doing a thorough job of it, and the proof came in

the afternoon when a tourist gives us a fresh copy of the Junction City Journal. The first thing that hits me on the front page is my own name, and when I later drags the paper into a corner and reads it, it's enough to make me mad.

I don't know who is the bird that writes these things for the paper, but he has certainly twisted up the facts. From the way it reads, I am the one who is cuckoo and not Muldoon, who his name is hardly mentioned, and with the way he talks about the New Idea Cigar, it looks like he's proved it's all a fake, and either I have got took in by a new idea swindle which he says is what they would expect, or I am at last getting into the stage where they wont let me vote, and whatever he means by it, I know it's nothing in my favor.

WHEN Herman later gets the paper, he shows it to Caroline; and what she says to me was plenty. It is not my nature to back down when I have started something, and I makes a hard stand for Muldoon even when my private opinion about him was getting wabbly. I was about ready to take the flivver for town and look him up when he finally comes drifting in the shop. I happens to be alone at the time and was glad of it.

"Well, Ed," Muldoon's voice booms out as he comes toward me, "the New Idea Cigar is already floating on high tide for success. It's going to be a knockout, Ed, and they're already waiting to try it."

"You look like enthusiasm," I tells him. "Did you see the afternoon's paper?"

"Right here," he answers, pulling one from his pocket. From the smile on him, and the way he flips the paper open, it looks like he's proud of it.

"I been reading it," I says. "When they make a circus out of something, do you think this looks like success?"

"Exactly what we want, Ed. The more they talk about lettuce, the more interested people will be to try it, and you ought to know human nature."

"There's some human natures that you'd have to take a pencil and paper to figure out," I says and looks at him sharp. "You sure this new idea we packed in jars is going to turn out O. K.?"

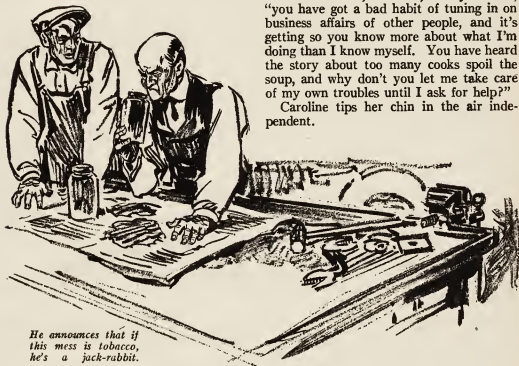
"It can't miss, Ed, and don't worry on that score."

"I was looking at it this morning," I says, "and don't see any change."

"You can't rush it by looking. If people

around here are doubtful, wait till the end of the week, and you will have something to show them that they will open their eyes."

"Maybe they will open the doors," I says. "You got any more of these samples?"



He announces that if this mess is tobacco, he's a jack-rabbit.

He digs up another handful and passes them over. When I takes them and begins looking at them close, I noticed from the corner of a eye that he's again acting nervous. They're the same as yesterday so far as I could see, and looked like real cigars, and between sizing them up and watching the way Muldoon is playing a whirl game with the watch-charm, it had me more skeptical than ever.

"I was going to mention," I says to him, "about maybe you need money to help along on advertising. You want me to advance a small amount?"

I waits to see how this strikes him, but he holds up a hand and shakes his head.

"Not a cent," he tells me. "Before people invest, they have got to believe in it, and I don't want you to get an idea that I am grabbing for money."

For a quarter-hour I listens to Muldoon while he works up new details of success, saying very little myself, and figuring

to give him plenty of rope so he'll do his own hanging, but if it's a skin game he's running, I have got to give him credit that he was running it smooth. When he finally leaves, I went upstairs and caught Caroline standing on the top step with her ears stretched and missing nothing.

"Did he say anything else?" she asks.

"Look at here, Caroline," I says to her, "you have got a bad habit of tuning in on business affairs of other people, and it's getting so you know more about what I'm doing than I know myself. You have heard the story about too many cooks spoil the soup, and why don't you let me take care of my own troubles until I ask for help?"

Caroline tips her chin in the air independent.

"There's another story I have also heard," she says, "which is everybody puts a finger in the pie, and if a lettuce-leaf faker like this one thinks he's going to run away with furniture money, he will have to wake up that these factory-made cheroots he's been handing you are not such new ideas as he thinks they are. And also he's not cuckoo, and you can depend on that."

Caroline flips out into the other room and closes the door. It's no use arguing with a woman, especially when you haven't got any facts that sound reasonable, and if you did have, they shut the door so they can't hear them, and you might as well give it up in the first place.

When I got in my room I opens one of the jars of New Idea to see how it's making progress, but there's no change.

NEXT morning comes the new development when John Flaxman, who runs the Flaxman Cigar Factory in Junction

City, shows up at the garage, and wasn't there but a few minutes till he gets me off by myself and steers the talk around to the subject of tobacco, winding up like I expected on lettuce-leaf cigars.

"I been hearing talk about it in town, Ed," he tells me, "and after reading the paper yesterday, I decided to drop in and see you. What kind of a game is it?"

"It's not a game," I objects; "it's a honest cigar enterprise, and if you've probably heard Muldoon telling about it in town, the facts are like he says. We're making them without tobacco."

Flaxman kind of pulls at his ear and looks at me.

"You think it's going to work?"

"Samples have already been made," I says.

"That's what I was going to ask about, Ed. This Muldoon has been giving away a few samples in town, but I didn't get one myself. He run out of them just before I got to him, but I heard him mention that you made them and I thought maybe I could get one from you."

"You say he claims that I made them?"

"I heard him telling it. Didn't you make them?"

I kind of hesitates. The more reports I get on Muldoon, the more cautious I watches how I'm stepping.

"These that he has got at present are ones he made himself," I informs Flaxman. "The first batch I am making wont be ready till Saturday, and I have got no statements until that time."

"Maybe that's what he said and I heard him wrong and got it twisted, Ed; I wasn't listening close. You got one of the samples he made?"

"I've got two or three," I admits, and reaches in my pocket. "You want to try one?"

"Being in the cigar-making business, I'm interested. Is this one of them?"

Flaxman takes the Muldoon sample. He rolls it in his fingers, smells of it, holds it closer to the window where the light strikes it, and then bites off the end and lights it.

"It's very fragrant," he says finally. "Where'd this Muldoon come from?"

I stands there doing some fast thinking.

"Look at here, Mr. Flaxman," I comes at him at last; "the fact is I met Muldoon only a couple days ago and don't know much about him, except I have wrote to a party in Pennsylvania where he gave me

reference, and no answer yet. He claims his recipe is O. K. You're a cigar man and must have a sound idea what the sample is made of; and while I wouldn't say it to other people, it's anyhow the truth that I don't know if I'm on my head or my feet. Could you give me your opinion about it?"

A SHORT space passes while Flaxman rolls at the cigar, puffs it and eyes the smoke, and then seems to come to conclusions.

"Ed," he announces to me, "they laughed at the first one who tried to run a steamboat, and also the same for Columbus when he says the world's not flat; but miracles keep happening and I'm not the one to holler fake at anybody, competition business or not. Maybe it's another miracle. Anyhow, Muldoon is a hustling boomer, and that's the kind to tie your kite to, and if your samples turn out Saturday, then I say go ahead."

Flaxman was turning around like he's ready to leave, but I reaches out and takes hold the front of his coat.

"What I want to know," I demands, "is whether the cheroot I gave you is cabbage or is it not!"

I waits for him, looking him in the eye.

"And that's what I can't tell you," he answers. "It looks and smells and smokes like tobacco; but if it didn't it wouldn't be a new idea. I say, go ahead."

It's all I could get out of him, and he went back to town. The way he mentioned tie a kite to Muldoon it sounded a little like he was figuring to say tie a can to him, but it's my policy to be sure you're right then go ahead, and if I'm not sure I'm right, I might as well go ahead anyhow, because the bank-account is still safe and drawing four per cent, and I'm not the kind to be hypnotized.

SATURDAY morning drags itself around, and it's fixed up with Muldoon that he will be here at nine o'clock and we'll open the batch for drying, as this takes a half-hour he claims, and then roll them up.

I was still on the fence about whether Muldoon is cuckoo, or a crook, or a mile-stone in history like he's been calling himself, and the boss has kept telling me that he's not a milestone but only a ordinary liar that's around trying to stir up trouble and not even getting paid for it.

Nine o'clock comes and Muldoon didn't



show up. I waits till ten and then tries to locate him on the phone at the places he's been hanging around in Junction City. When I gets the Metro Poolroom on the wire, it turns out that Muldoon hasn't been there today, and as it's the first day for a week that he's missed, the proprietor asks me what has happened to him.

At noon I still couldn't find him.

"What you want Muldoon for?" the boss asks. "Can't you twist the tops off the jars without help?"

"I'm no cigar-maker," I says, "and if it does prove out O. K., I wouldn't know how to roll them, on account it's a trick to it."

"If you got to have a cigar-maker," the boss says, "call up Henry Beck in town. He's made plenty and will tell you the truth that you can't smoke pickled lettuce and you ought to knew it in the first place."

It was a fact that the jars looked to me like they're a long way from tobacco, but I anyhow had my mind made up to see it through, and then find Muldoon for a talk that would show me what's going on, or I don't know my name.

I finally calls up Beck and has to pay him ten dollars to drive out from town, and all the use I got out of him was that he pokes his fingers into the jars, and then spreads it out on paper and smells of it, but wouldn't taste it, and at last announces that if this mess is tobacco, he is a jack-rabbit.

I was convinced about it myself anyhow, and makes quick work paying him off and getting rid of him, and we didn't wait to do any drying as I knew when I got enough. A few minutes after he's gone, I was piling into the flivver for town.

"Where you going?" the boss hollers.

"I'm going to look up a certain party named Muldoon," I answers. "It's time somebody is going to find out what is what



"What do you think is a fair amount for the help you gave us, Ed?"

and look at here, Caroline, what you climbing in for?"

"I'm going to town with you," she informs me, and makes herself comfortable like the matter is settled.

I didn't think myself that it was settled, but it develops that it was, and when I starts the car she was still in it and not making any explanations on why she is going with me.

WHEN we hits town and turns up Pine Street on low speed, we begins passing people that knew me. They all seemed to be looking at me interested. Muldoon didn't miss anybody with his talking, as I could tell the last day or two on account the phone-calls I been getting inquiring about New Idea, and also even letters; and with the way the *Journal* has been printing new articles calling me the Cabbage Tobacco King, you couldn't blame people for looking.

Caroline is sitting quiet in the back seat and no sound from her till we turned the corner in front of Corbin's Drug Store. I suddenly pulls down to a stop, my eyes sticking out in the direction of Corbin's window.

"Caroline," I speaks up at last, "do you see it?"

"I certainly do," she says.

What's in Corbin's window was a cigar

display that took my wind. The boxes were stocked up in wholesale piles, and over the top was a sign you could see a block, reading: "New Idea Cigar."

While I'm staring at it, I gets conscious Caroline is talking. "If you'd peek around in other directions," she was saying, "you might see more to surprise you."

What she meant was the Metro Poolroom window across the street, and I sees it a second later. The display there is piled higher, and the sign bigger.

Herb McFadden, who runs the Metro, must have looked through the window and saw us parked across the street, and he slips on his hat and walks over.

"It's a knockout, Ed," he says to me. "You can't beat human nature when it comes to curiosity, and I keeps telling them the lettuce stories is only advertising and they're made of tobacco, but they insist on trying them, even cigarette customers. How'd you get into this, Ed?"

"Herb," I says to him, and looks at him square, "where'd you get them cigars?"

"At Flaxman's," he says.

IT was maybe less than ten minutes when I pulls up in front of Flaxman's Cigar Factory, and gets out of the car. Caroline was at my heels.

"Caroline, for the last time," I says, "you heard about a woman's place is at home. Why don't you sit in the car and let me handle business?"

"Are you trying to make a scene on the sidewalk?" she inquires. "There's a clerk in the door waiting for us."

It was one of Flaxman's clerks on the front step, and when I looks toward him, he motions with his finger to come in.

"Mr. Flaxman is in the office at the back," he informs us. "He said you might be here, and if you come, to send you in. Straight ahead where his name is on the door, and you don't have to knock."

Inside the office I stops, with Caroline close in back of me. At the desk was Flaxman, smoking and looking pleased. Opposite him sits Muldoon, his eyes already on me and his face settled into a mechanical-looking smile. For a second I stands there sizing up the layout, and it's Flaxman that finally speaks.

"We been expecting you to drop in, Ed. In fact, I was just trying to get you on the phone, and was talking with Mr. Muldoon about you, and what your services for the last week ought to be worth."

"And I was saying to treat you handsome," Muldoon adds on.

I flares up at Muldoon.

"What kind of a racket have you been trying to run?" I explodes. I feels Caroline pull at the back of my coat, but this was once when I was started and nobody could stop me, and the kind of roasting I handed Muldoon was something he wont easy forget. He was on the other side the desk, and at the top of the hollering I began edging around in his direction. Flaxman finally gets in front of me and quiets me down, as I was by this time part winded anyhow.

"Muldoon is only working for me," Flaxman repeats. "And we want to satisfy everybody, Ed. It's a big publicity success, and if Muldoon has misled you some, it's only because he's a professional advertising man, and guaranteed to get me results. We'll settle this friendly, Ed. We had to find some local young man, and you happened to answer our ad, and we picked you; and with the talk we have made, and the free space in the newspaper, it's put my New Idea Brand on the market with a splash that's well worth while."

"What about lettuce?" I cuts in.

Flaxman spreads out his hands.

"The lettuce excitement was only to advertise; people are bound to try such a cigar, and we use pure Havana. What do you think is a fair amount for the help you gave us, Ed?"

He was opening up a check-book, and it's an odd thing how a check prospect can help to smooth things out. I feels a tug at the back of my coat, where Caroline is standing. If she hadn't pulled at me, I had it on the end of my tongue to mention that I thought a hundred was a fair amount. I makes a swift decision to ask for two hundred. But before I could speak up, Caroline steps in front of me and I hears her telling Flaxman that we've already agreed on what we think the service is worth, and the amount she names is five hundred.

"And that's very reasonable, Mr. Flaxman," she says; and he must have been convinced that it was a fair amount, because when I slides out to the flivver later, I has a five hundred check in my hand, and Caroline still at my elbow.

"It's all right this time," I says to her, "but as I always claim, and still do, a woman's place is not in business; and you spoke too quick, Caroline—I would have asked for a thousand."



"So you have come to arrest me?" asked Durant.

The Trail of Death

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"North of Trouville" offers you one of the most keenly dramatic of all these absorbing stories by the gifted author of "Geyser Reef," "Madagascar Gold" and many other well-remembered tales.

WHEN the telephone in Durant's room tinkled, he knew instinctively it was fate calling.

He had finished breakfast, had just closed his bags; in another five minutes he would have been paying his bill and leaving the little hostelry in the Rue Vignon. And then the sharp, insistent summons! Even as he reached for the instrument, his eyes flitted out to the old narrow Paris street below—no, escape was hopeless.

"M. Durant?" It was the voice of the hotel proprietor. "There are some gentlemen here asking for you."

The peculiar intonation made Durant divine the truth.

"Of the police?" he inquired.

"Yes, m'sieur."

"Ask them to come up to my room, if you please."

Durant laid the instrument on its rack. Caught, then! Not quick enough in getting away. He should have gone at once to Makoff's house the previous night, as soon as he learned its address. He had seen by the morning papers that Woroff the dancer, chief assistant to Boris Makoff, master of crime, had been killed the previous afternoon; his slayers were arrested, caught red-handed. The papers did not say it was thanks to Durant that they were caught—only the subprefect of police knew it. And now he had run down Durant!

"Enter!" called Durant, to the sharp rap at the door.

To his surprise, he saw it was the subprefect, but alone. M. Ducasse entered, with a bow, and stood for a moment regarding his prey. He was a handsome man—thinly bearded, his face proud, aquiline, powerful, his eyes cruelly cold; in his ex-

pression was something sardonic, as though he found the world humorous and bitter.

This man battled against all the underworld of Paris, and made a fair job of it.

"Good morning, M. Durant," he said. White teeth showed through his beard as he smiled. "You see, I have discovered your name, have found you! You did me a good turn yesterday, for which I owe you thanks, but I could not have so intelligent and able a man loose in Paris without knowing more about him."

"So you have come to arrest me?" asked Durant. The other gestured.

"I have come to barter freedom—for information."

MEETING those piercing, indomitable eyes, Durant made his decision swiftly. He was now dealing with a Frenchman, to whom the personal appeal meant everything. Defiance would only bring down violence.

"Be seated, M. Ducasse," he said, and fumbled for pipe and tobacco. The subprefect took a chair, adjusted the flower in his buttonhole, and smiled.

"You aroused my curiosity yesterday, m'sieur," he said. "An American, allied with thugs! An honest man mixed up with thieves! You even mentioned a gang of which I had never heard—an incredible thing, I assure you!"

Durant nodded, and smiled cynically.

"You want to know more about me?"

"I already know something. Since the war you have been employed in a bank here. Sometime ago you were called to America by the death of a relative; you are now wealthy. Eh?"

"Correct enough." Durant sat on the table, puffed at his pipe, swung a leg carelessly. "Coming over on the boat, I met a lady. I had often seen her, here in Paris; now I met her. By sheer accident, I learned that she was in the grip of a blackmailer, a criminal organizer, a man who plans and carries out large and small things. I undertook to free her from his grip. As a preliminary step, I got into his good graces, joined his gang. The lady in question is Baronne Glincka, widow of a Russian—an American girl whose marriage was unlucky. The man is her former husband's relative, one Boris Makoff."

"The Baronne Glincka!" murmured M. Ducasse, lifting his brows.

"Who is forced to assist Boris at his work, forced to pay heavily, forced to lend

her position and talent to further his schemes."

"I know her, though I would never have dreamed this," said the other. "But I do not know Boris Makoff, or anyone of that name."

"He calls himself Baron Glincka—"

"Ah! That man!" The eyes of Ducasse flamed suddenly. "You mean it? Why, it seems impossible, fantastic! He is well known—wealthy, a Russian noble—"

"A criminal," said Durant. "There is my story, m'sieur, in brief."

Ducasse, inspecting him with frank curiosity, shook his head slowly.

"You have taken on an impossible achievement, m'sieur."

Durant laughed at him. "So? But he does not suspect me. I have discovered where he lives. I am going to him. Yesterday three of his best men were removed. When I have stripped away his defenses, I shall secure the documents which give him his hold on the Baronne, and my work is done."

"An impossibility." And now Ducasse spoke gravely. "But you speak of stripping! That is a harsh word, m'sieur, as you use it. It means killing."

"Exactly," said Durant, and his eyes were cold. "These men are like wild beasts, to be treated as such."

"I am interested in bringing them to justice," said the other softly.

"I am not," said Durant. "I am interested only in playing my own game—and winning. I can do it only in my own way. But you don't know everything! I've won over to my side the dope ring here in Paris, through an American agent of theirs whom I aided. They will give me every assistance against Boris Makoff."

Ducasse grinned at this. "The dope ring! I congratulate you on your friends, m'sieur. You fight fire with fire, eh?"

"With anything, to win!" exclaimed Durant vibrantly. He came suddenly to his feet. "I play this game, m'sieur, for the sake of a woman. What are you going to do about it? Interfere, and it's war between us. Hands off, and you'll be the gainer in the end. What do you choose?"

Ducasse fairly gasped, then leaned back and surveyed Durant with a flicker of admiration in his sardonic eyes.

"War! You dare threaten me—Paris—all France?"

"I dare anything," said Durant, giving him look for look.

"You, a lone American? Why, it is laughable!"

"Then arrest me," said Durant calmly, "and declare war—if you dare."

Their eyes met and held.

"Sacred name of a dog!" ejaculated M. Ducasse, and came to his feet. "You mean it! Well, my friend, I think you are a madman. And I never interfere with madmen if I can help it."

"You mean—"

M. Ducasse bowed, half-mockingly. "That you are free to pursue your own road, m'sieur, with my blessing! After all, you did me a service yesterday. Next time—we shall see."

And the subprefect of police departed.

ONCE alone, Durant called Boris Makoff on the telephone.

"Boris? Durant speaking," he said in English, which the other spoke fluently. "Thought I'd hear from you last night. According to the papers—"

"So you're still at that hotel?" said the Russian. "Don't be a fool. Cover up."

"I intend to," Durant laughed softly. "I'll be right along to your Avenue Mozart place."

Makoff swore. "Confound you! You know about it?"

"From Woroff."

"Huh! Wait a minute, now—don't come here. I'm up against it. Everything's cracked up for the moment." The Russian's voice was crisp, businesslike, alert. "I had to send the Baronne to Trouville this morning. Can you join her and take charge of a deal there? This cursed run of luck must stop, or I'll begin to think something's wrong."

Durant, startled as he was by this news that Helen Glincka was gone to Trouville, chuckled to himself. Boris Makoff might well curse—certainly his organization was badly smashed, a number of his cleverest men lost, his schemes knocked awry!

"Yes," said Durant. "But what's in it? I'm beginning to think that I won't get much by working for you, Boris."

An inarticulate snarl brought a grin to his lips. Others, probably, were saying the same thing.

"Meet me at the Gare St. Lazare in thirty minutes," returned Makoff. "You can get the Trouville express. I'll show you what's in it."

"Done," said Durant, and rang off.

He did not want to leave Paris. He

did not at all want to visit the twin resort towns of Trouville-Deauville on the Normandy coast. He wanted to come to grips with Boris Makoff as quickly as possible. But Helen Glincka had gone—that changed everything. He could be with her, could no doubt get further information from her about Makoff's place in the Avenue Mozart, headquarters of the wily Russian; he might even manage a blow at Makoff or the latter's men.

"The rascal must be short-handed if he'd send us on such an errand," thought Durant. "He probably meant Woroff to go—well, we'll see! Now for Lewis."

He called up the American dope-smugger whom he knew, and on whose influence he might rely for help.

"I'm off for Trouville on the morning express, Lewis," he said. "Something's up, there—I don't know what. Have your friends any agent in that vicinity?"

"They sure have," Lewis laughed over the wire. "If it wasn't for Deauville in summer, where would all the money come from? Tell me where to reach you, and I'll have a wire waiting with his name. Meantime, I'll have them wire him full instructions to help you."

"Good man. I don't know where I'll be, but wire me in care of the Trouville branch of the Crédit Lyonnais, and I'll call for it in the morning."

"Right. Good luck to you!"

Leaving one of his bags here, Durant took the other and set out afoot for the Gare St. Lazare, only a few blocks distant. He delayed *en route* to buy a few toilet articles, so that when he entered the big gray station it was close to ten o'clock. As he mounted to the train level, he came upon Makoff, at the head of the stairs.

There was nothing small about the Russian, mentally or physically. He was a burly, powerful figure, impeccably clad in morning attire from hat to spats; his dark, dangerously eager eyes fastened upon Durant, he came to the latter's side.

"Late! You've ten minutes to make the train. Here's a ticket and first-class reservation for you. Come along—talk on the platform."

Durant nodded, took the tickets held out, accompanied Makoff through the gates, across the waiting-space beyond, and so to the train-gates. Once on the platform beside the train, the Russian took his arm and broke into soft speech.

"For the moment, my friend, things are

badly disorganized here—a series of disasters, you comprehend? Well, fate evens up. Here's your car. I've put a package in your seat; take care of it. You've heard of Kaparien?"

Durant shook his head.

"One of the Greek syndicate that controls the gambling at Deauville. He's half Greek, half Armenian, very wealthy, and a scoundrel," said Boris Makoff. "His yacht is at Trouville now, and he's going north to Etretat and Ostend in a day or two. If you never heard of him, I suppose you've heard of Count Corvos, the Austrian?"

"Naturally," said Durant. "He's said to have the finest collection of uncut stones in existence."

Makoff chuckled. "Not any more—Kaparien has it. The Austrian plunged at the Deauville tables, and the syndicate took over his little collection. It happened last week. Kaparien is taking the stones with him—he's going to meet a certain actress at Ostend, and open a campaign against her virtuous scruples. No very hard matter, I imagine. My Deauville man only learned of all this at the last moment. I got Hélène off this morning, and will wire her; she'll meet you. Trust her! Things will be arranged—"

The train began to move, without warning, in the almost insensible glide of French trains at starting. Durant swung to the steps.

"Propotkin—my man at Deauville—fully trusted—all details—luck to you!" came in snatches from the Russian, and then no more.

DURANT passed along the car until he found his own compartment—a first-class smoker in which were ensconced two American tourists. His own seat was marked by a small, rather heavy package wrapped in brown paper. He put it in the rack with his grip, not opening it, and settled down to the four-hour trip.

Nothing could so clearly denote the fix in which Boris Makoff found himself as this emergency call upon Durant and Helen Glincka. The Russian was convinced he could trust them both—holding the woman in pawn through fear, the man through grudging respect. Durant knew that his part must be to fetch the loot safely back to Makoff, and for once he found himself quite willing to play the Russian's criminal game.

In his years of struggle, Ralph Durant

had acquired a point of view which, to most men, would have been extremely perilous. For the law he cared nothing. He had seen so much of the world's injustice and misery, so much of the men who battered upon other folk, the easy schemers who evaded the law and preyed upon less clever men, that it had imbued him with a cynical disregard for the justice of men. In the present instance, he was entirely willing to see Kaparien robbed, and to have Makoff profit at the man's expense—even to share in the work. It would be robbing the vulture to pay the buzzard. Kaparien, one of the crew who sat back and profited by the gambling instinct of others, deserved no sympathy. He had taken over the gem-collection of Count Corvos direct from the gaming tables, and Durant had no hesitation in lifting his loot.

Besides, by doing so, he would win through to his objective. As he had told Ducasse that morning, the one great objective before him was to free Helen, Baroness Glincka, from the strangle-grip of Makoff. To this end he must bide his time, temporize until the chance came, risk no failure. To this end he must bend everything that turned up, with a ruthless disregard of ethics or anything else, even the lives of men. Already the trail behind him had been starred by the dead.

"We'll put it through," he resolved grimly. "We'll put it through at all costs—and come back to Paris with the end in sight! At all costs."

In this mood, avoiding his fellow-travelers, he reached Trouville early in the afternoon, and did not find Helen Glincka at the station to meet him.

He passed from the platform on through the station, and out to the front. There he set down his bag and gazed around. It was a brilliant scene that greeted him, in the hot summer sunlight.

THE wide space before the station was crowded with vehicles—automobiles, huge busses, taxicabs, victorias, dogcarts. Opposite, the sidewalk cafés were crowded, and the gay sweaters and blazers of tourists were everywhere. To the right, against the green hills, spread out ancient Trouville, with the gray houses back from the esplanade and quay where the fishing craft swung in the deep and narrow port, and the casino out at the sea-end.

To the left was Deauville, garish, modern, aswing with life and action. Op-

posite the station, beyond the grimy coal-ing port, lay the yacht basin, where a dozen splendid money-wasters were moored against the quays.

Abruptly, Durant found a man at his elbow, heard his name.

"Pardon—this is M. Durant, perhaps?"

Turning, Durant beheld a queer figure—

Propotkin gave the address, then made a sign of caution to Durant, who nodded.

They rolled across the narrow bridge and turned out along the wide Trouville esplanade, on to the seaward face of the town. There, before the square fronting the casino, the taxi halted. Durant went into the bank and inquired for a telegram



Fougères snatched the bottle. "M'sieur, you are generous—" "No," said Durant, "I am giving orders."

a short, extremely wide-shouldered man with luxuriant curled whiskers and high-boned face, and very long arms; in short, a man who only needed a beard-clipping to pose as a gorilla in clothes. He was soberly dressed in black, and might have been a shopkeeper.

"I am M. Durant," said the American. "You are Propotkin?"

The other bowed slightly. "I have a shop in Deauville, m'sieur—jewelry and curious things. May I take you there for a chat?"

"No one else will meet me?"

Propotkin smiled. "Unfortunately no, m'sieur. Madame is engaged."

"All right. But I have to get to the Crédit Lyonnais in Trouville at once—I'm expecting a telegram there, and the bank will be shut before long."

"Nothing simpler, m'sieur. Here is a taxi now—"

A taxicab came up, and they entered.

sent him here. One was found and delivered to him.

In the doorway, he tore open the sealed blue paper, curious to see who the agent of the dope ring here might prove to be. He read:

Our man is Propotkin, jeweler, Deauville.
Good luck. LEWIS.

Durant burst into laughter as he shredded the telegram and cast it away. Propotkin! Agent both for Boris Makoff and for the Paris dope ring!

AS the taxi returned to Deauville, the jeweler spoke quietly:

"M. Durant has many friends in Paris, it appears!"

Durant nodded, reading danger in the situation, but meeting it halfway with his usual calm assurance. Propotkin had received a wire from Boris Makoff—and had received another from the dope ring. What had this other said?

"What did they wire you about me?" he

asked, turning and looking into the man's alert dark eyes. "Not Boris—the others."

Propotkin grinned. "Only that you were to be trusted and obeyed."

"And what would Boris say," demanded Durant slowly, "if he knew you were working for others—eh?"

The shot told. Propotkin darted him a sharp, alarmed glance, then laughed and relaxed.

"What about yourself, my friend?"

Durant only smiled. He was quite certain of his ground now, and in his smile was a queer conviction as he gazed at Propotkin—a realization. This man, this human gorilla, was agent for the dope ring in Deauville, a retailer of drugs, another bird of prey who got his claws into the victims of the baccarat tables. Durant felt that he would kill this Propotkin with great pleasure. He would be doing the world a distinct service.

In Deauville now—past the public square, on toward the casino where the "fast" set of Paris, the demi-monde of France, the gullible tourists, gathered to be plucked. Before reaching the garish building, the taxi turned off a side-street, and halted before a small shop whose window was filled with cheap jewelry and tourist curios. Propotkin alighted and paid the driver, then led the way into the shop, after unlocking it. He had no assistant, then!

Durant followed him into a back room of good size, furnished as a living-room—the man's apartment obviously opened off the shop.

"You have lunched?" asked the Russian. "Good—then let us be comfortable. Here are cigarettes. We have an hour before Madame la Baronne calls for you! I suppose you know the game?"

"The general scheme, but no details."

"I have arranged all details," said Propotkin complacently, fingering his luxurious whiskers. "Kaparien, like most of his class, is eager for social distinction. Mme. la Baronne is now a guest aboard his yacht, and you are to join her there—the two of you only, to Ostend. You are an American millionaire, a friend of Baroness Glincka. She is to call for you here in an hour. So far, understood?"

DURANT nodded, and lighted a cigarette. The other went on, much pleased with himself, looking more than ever like a simian as he sprawled in his chair.

"It is really quite simple—almost too simple. Two men of the crew are my men; the yacht has been lying here a fortnight, you see. There are three officers, including Kaparien himself, and four in the crew. That makes three of you against four. Two others will be aboard to act at the right moment. That makes five against four."

"I don't intend to appear in it," said Durant calmly. The other grinned.

"I don't intend you shall! Twenty minutes after you leave Trouville, Kaparien will be killed, my four men in command of the yacht, you and the Baronne presumably prisoners. You will, however, be at work. It's your job to learn where the stones are kept and to blow the safe if you can't get into it. Then pass the stones to one of our men. I'll be alongside with a fast motor-boat, and all get away, to land up the river at Villerville and scatter, unless we go on to Rouen. The yacht will go on to Le Havre or back to Trouville; you and the Baronne will be promptly set free, though you'll have to act as witnesses, and that's all."

"Hm! Very simple," said Durant dryly. "Two objections, my friend. To insure your get-away, you must pull off the affair at night; you can't do it as soon as the yacht has left port!"

Propotkin chuckled delightedly at this.

"Oh, can't I? But the yacht is in Trouville harbor and must leave at high tide, since at low tide the place is a mud-flat. In fact, she's been having some scraping done, to save drydock expense! Further, Kaparien always leaves harbor at night, in order to be at sea by dawn. He'll get away around two o'clock, if he goes tomorrow night."

Durant nodded reflectively. This hairy rascal seemed to have everything mapped out.

"The second objection is more important," he said. "I was sent to get the stones and bring them back to Paris—not help you get them."

Propotkin lost his grin. Seeing a quiet, steady purpose in Durant's gaze, he sat up, gasped out protests—worked himself up to explosive pitch. Durant only shook his head in silence, and waited. The Russian cursed, threatened, pleaded, but all to no purpose.

"You're wasting time," said Durant at length, calmly inflexible before all the gesticulating and torrents of words. "I'm

taking orders from Boris Makoff, not from you. I'm beginning to think that you want to clean out those gems for yourself and get away with them."

"It is not so!" exclaimed Propotkin vehemently. "And you must do as I say—"

"Yes?" Durant smiled at him. "Perhaps you forget the other telegram which reached you from Paris today? I think it said you were to obey me?"

The Russian flung up his hands and collapsed like a punctured balloon.

"What do you want?" he demanded sullenly, staring at Durant.

"I'll tell you that when the time comes." Durant's eye fell upon the package left in his care by Boris Makoff, and he was suddenly reticent. He reached out for the package and tore it open. Two smaller packages fell into his lap.

HE opened the first, while Propotkin watched in wondering surmise. From it he took a pistol, fully loaded, and an extra clip of cartridges. This he pocketed. The second package was extremely heavy, tied with thick cord. Propotkin produced a knife and Durant cut the cord. This package, opened, again produced two packages.

One of these contained some dozens of bank-notes, new, fresh, crisp thousand-franc notes. Propotkin uttered a low gasp at sight of them, and reached forward, his eyes avid. Durant let him take them, and opened the second and heavier packet. This, wrapped in oiled silk, contained a steel die.

Durant sat motionless, giving no sign of the amazement gripping him, while his brain groped with the problem—and reached the solution. Why had Boris Makoff given no reason for intrusting him with this burden, which meant hard labor for life if it got into the wrong hands? The Russian had been afraid to speak of it at the station, obviously; had confidently left it to Durant, or perhaps had sent some message through Helen.

"So you didn't expect this, eh?" asked Durant.

Propotkin gasped again. "Forged!" he exclaimed, dropping the sheaf of notes in his lap and staring at the die. "And that is what did it—"

"Exactly." Durant wrapped up bank-notes and die once more, then regarded the man with calm assurance. "So you see, your little scheme did not go far enough!

Now you shall take your instructions from me. Agreed?"

"But yes, m'sieur," muttered the other.

"And you will not fail to do as I say?"

"Oh, *si, si!*"

Durant lit a fresh cigarette. "Bring these aboard the yacht yourself. Let us assume there is a safe in the cabin—eh?"

"There is one," said the other. "I have everything ready for you—to blow it."

Durant nodded. "You'll come down to the cabin where it is. I'll attend to the safe, to save you time in escaping. The stones I'll keep myself—it won't be dangerous. You'll take everything else out of the safe, and keep it for your trouble; Kaparien will be certain to have a large sum aboard. Put this die and these forged notes in the safe, and go. You'll be supposed to have taken the stones, and no attention will be paid me. It will be thought Kaparien was a note-forgery. Since the Hungarian forgeries, the public is wild about such things; the murder and robbery will be quickly forgotten. It will be thought that the Greek syndicate here was behind the forgeries, using the notes at the baccarat tables; the newspapers will play it up, everything else will drop to second place—"

Propotkin leaped to his feet. "Admirable!" he exclaimed. "Here is true genius—it is magnificent! M'sieur, I bow humbly to such a brain!"

"Thank you," said Durant modestly. He had, he believed, correctly fathomed the intent of Boris Makoff—indeed, the course was obvious enough. "Then take charge of these things, and don't fail to bring them."

Propotkin nodded. He rose, took the wrapped-up die and forged notes, and disappeared with them into another room. Durant sat in growing exultation, as the thing gradually opened out before him—the whole thing, cut and dried, as though on a screen! When the Russian returned, Durant spoke:

"Who's in charge of things aboard the yacht? I'd better be in touch with him, in case anything goes wrong."

The other laughed heartily. "Who? The steward, one Jean Fougères—a Frenchman. And how did I reach him? Because he needs the little white powder, you comprehend? It is not a bad thing to have two irons in the fire, eh? It is Jean who will attend to Kaparien."

Durant nodded carelessly. "Right. I'll

get in touch with him. When does all this come off—tomorrow night, you say?"

"We'll know definitely when Mme. la Baronne comes. She should be here any moment."

"By the way," said Durant, "I wish you'd give me a small bottle of the stuff, Propotkin. I don't use it myself, but I may have need of it. A few ounces."

"Eh?" The other stared. "A few ounces? Do you know what it is worth?"

Durant shrugged. "No, nor care. Charge it to me in your account with the syndicate."

"Very well, m'sieur."

The Russian disappeared again. When he returned, he was holding a small bottle, unlabeled, filled with a white powder. He extended it to Durant.

"Here you are—unadulterated, too. Is that enough? It should supply any ordinary addict for a month or two."

"Plenty, thanks." Durant took the vial and pocketed it carefully. Here was forged another link in the chain—that chain of trickery and intrigue which had flashed across his alert brain. He would fight fire with fire in this matter, and with fire redoubled! Playing a lone hand, with swift and certain death as the penalty for errors or squeamishness, he was efficient and merciless as rock.

"What about blowing that safe?" he asked.

"Wait until the Baronne comes," said Propotkin, fingering his curled whiskers. "She'll bring word from Jean—he thought he might learn the combination, which would make the work needless. If he fails, I'll send aboard a package tomorrow, containing everything from drills to nitroglycerin. You can manage it?"

"At a pinch."

LESS than a minute later, came the tinkle of a bell—some one had come into the outer shop. Propotkin slipped out, and in the exchange of voices following, Durant heard the clear even tones of Helen Glincka. A thrill ran over him, and he came to his feet. The curtain across the door was pushed away, and she came toward him, hand extended. Wordless, he bowed over it in French fashion, then straightened up and looked into her eyes. She was murmuring some conventional greeting, but it was the eyes of her that spoke loudest to him, the sky-blue eyes full of questioning, mute alarm, entreaty!

"It's all right, Helen," he said quietly in English, giving her hand a quick pressure. Then, as Propotkin followed her into the room: "You have a message for us from Jean? From the steward?"

She nodded, took the chair Propotkin set out for her.

"He got the combination of the safe this morning," she returned. "Why would it not be possible to do the work without harming Kaparien? Tonight, say, when we're all at the casino?"

"No," said Durant promptly. "I've no sympathy for such a man—let him pay! Besides, we cannot change the plan; Boris has mapped it out admirably. Eh, Propotkin?"

"Oh, a magnificent plan!" exclaimed the Russian with enthusiasm. As he looked at the man, Durant smiled; and watching his cold eyes in that smile, the baroness shivered.

"I've come for you," she said simply. "The car outside will take your bag or bags to the yacht. We'll go over to the Potinière together—the café opposite the casino, you know—and Kaparien will meet us there a bit later. I've been shopping. Are you ready?"

Durant nodded. "Ready," he said, and looked at Propotkin. "Don't forget that package, when you come aboard! Then we sail tomorrow night, Helen?"

"Yes," she said. "A little after midnight."

Propotkin grinned.

HELEN GLINCKA was very beautiful—not in the fashion of the painted professional beauties to whom Deauville is used, nor that of the pink-cheeked, free-striding American girls to whom it is also used, but in a delicate fashion all her own.

A day had passed since Durant's arrival in Trouville. He had met Kaparien, had gone aboard the yacht, had settled into the swing of the business; now once again he sat under the wide shade-trees of the Potinière, with Helen Glincka across the table and an hour of privacy ahead. They were in the back corner by the cake-shop, and could talk freely.

Here, as everywhere, women looked long at Helen Glincka, men looked once and again; her very passing created a little ripple of eager interest. To Durant, her delicate features beneath their crown of pale golden hair looked strained and anxious;

strongly carven as they were, they seemed a half-broken mask.

"Boris is a remarkable man," he observed, "to bend such a woman to his purpose!"

Her blue eyes rested upon him calmly, yet underneath the calm was desperation.

"Once he learns you're trying to help me—you know what will happen."

As Kaparien whirled about, Durant's fist struck him solidly.



"He'll expose you? He'll tell the world that your husband tricked you, had been secretly married to an opera singer before he married you?"

She gestured impatiently. "I'm talking about you, not about myself."

"I'm talking about you." Durant smiled, and under his poised assurance her eyes lost the strained, tense expression, a little tinge of color crept into her cheeks. "I want to know where Boris keeps the proof of that first marriage."

She shrugged. "How should I know? I see little of him, hear from him only when he needs money or assistance."

"He calls himself Baron Glincka and lives in the Avenue Mozart. He is well known by that name."

Her eyes widened. "You mean it? It is his family name, but he is not a baron—"

"No matter. You haven't been inside his house?"

"No. And the other woman is to be in Paris this week—my money and influence have gone to bring her. She is to sing at the Opéra Comique."

Durant nodded, stung by the bitterness of her voice. He could realize what humiliation this woman was suffering.

"Elsa Muscova, eh?"

"Her real name is Elsa Swinger."

"I know. Well, we'll attend to her in short order, Helen. Boris must be short-handed to make such use of us."

"He is, dreadfully. He thinks he can depend on you—he imagines that you're infatuated with me—"

Durant looked at her steadily. "It's the

truth. I've always loved you, since those days when you would come into the bank three times a week, and I'd look up and see you—"

She flushed, her eyes tender now.

"Folly! But, my friend, delicious folly—I never thought there was such a man in the world. There's frankness for frankness. I didn't suppose—"

"Poor kid! You've run up against the wrong kind, like most of 'em over here, and you went on the rocks. Well, I'm going to pull you off," said Durant. "Then we'll go to Mentone or Juan les Pins or Pau together and forget there ever was a world. And I'm going to pull you off the rocks quickly, too—there's no time to waste! Look here, now—is Kaparien a particular friend of yours?"

"That man? A friend?" She made a distasteful motion. "How could you think so?"

Durant chuckled. "Just wanted to make sure. You buck up, now, and face what happens tonight—plenty will happen, or I miss my guess! Then we'll go back to Paris with the stones, and open up the main attack. First I'll deal with this Elsa Muscova, and through her with Boris."

"But what will you do—what can you do?"

"Fight." Durant's gray eyes were cold and hard as stone. "Just now I'm passive, twisting things to suit my purpose, waiting. Once I hit Paris, I start in to fight, with any weapons—creating weapons if I haven't any. Helen, this is an absolutely ruthless, pitiless game; to pull you off the rocks, I'm going to wreck anything in sight! And you're coming off."

"Oh!" Her eyes shone, and for an instant her breath came fast. "To be free—but no, you can't manage it. Nobody could. You'll only involve yourself, my friend—"

Durant laughed. "We'll see about that! To business, now. What's the program for today?"

"Kaparien will be here any minute—the casino's open already. There's a try-out this afternoon of that acrobatic dancing act from Stockholm, and I admit I'm interested. Then back to the yacht for dinner. One of Kaparien's partners will be with us, and an English baronet and his wife—one of the impecunious-traveling kind who stay out of England. It's a shabby business all around. Then here for the evening; they're giving *Tosca* tonight. An hour at the tables afterward, I suppose, and then back to the yacht. Kaparien wants to leave port around one o'clock, with the tide."

Durant nodded. "Good. And here's our friend now."

KAPARIEN came toward them, bowing and smiling here and there as he threaded his way among the tables. He was clad all in white from hat to shoes, with a glitter of diamonds; few men can wear white with any luck, and Kaparien was not one of the few. His swarthy, vulpine face, his powerful figure, his heavily-lidded geniality, were not pleasant to Durant, who found something reptilian in the man.

None the less, as it was his business to do, Durant made himself highly agreeable.

The tea-hour finished—more English and Americans were here than French—they passed across to the casino and up the stairs into the great hall. Here, about the *boule* or two-per-cent roulette tables in the rear was a small crowd of pikers; the main interest was centered in the stage. Kaparien, given much deference by the waiters, had a table reserved.

To Durant it was all rather a bore, but he was amused by the attitude of Kaparien, who tried to show himself a polished man of the world. To pierce this mask of culture was easy; beneath it, Durant found a typical hybrid Greek, sensuous, regarding the world as his prey, wolfish. A man who could be merciless as stone, devoid of any sympathy or regard for those in his power. At the present moment, Kaparien was doing his best to make use of the social touch given him by Baroness Glincka—he little dreamed that both the baroness and the supposed American millionaire knew all about the lady he was hoping to meet at Ostend.

Durant was glad when they adjourned to the yacht toward six o'clock. The *Elektra* lay in the yacht basin between the twin towns, moored against the quay. She was a luxurious craft of good size, fitted rather for coasting from port to port in leisurely enjoyment of life than for any real sea-work, and Kaparien had obviously lavished money on her.

Durant had a small cabin to himself. The three separated at once to dress for dinner, as the other guests would arrive by seven. Once in his own cabin, Durant rang for the steward; the moment for action had arrived. A moment later Jean Fougères presented himself; he was a thin, pallid little Frenchman, with enormous black mustaches.

"Come in and shut the door," said Durant. "Can you give me five minutes?"

"Certainly, m'sieur." Fougères entered, closed the door, waited. Durant looked at him.

"Do you know that I am in charge of the job tonight?"

"Yes, m'sieur. M. Propotkin so informed me today."

"Oh! Did he inform you, by any chance, that he has double-crossed all of us and intends to skip, leaving us to face the music?"

The pallid face of Fougères became ashen as death, and his eyes burned.

"M'sieur!" he exclaimed. "It—it is impossible!"

"On the contrary," said Durant coldly. He produced the vial Propotkin had given him and handed it to the steward. "There is a present for you. When that runs out, come to me in Paris and you shall have more. Is it understood?"

Fougères snatched the little bottle and examined it, caught his breath.

"M'sieur! You are generous—"

"No, I am giving orders. Do you intend to obey them?"

"With all my heart. If this is true about M. Propotkin—what shall we do?"

"Carry through all the plans as arranged. Where is the safe? I have seen none."

"Behind the painting of Venus in the smoking salon. Lift down the picture."

"The combination?"

"Is here, m'sieur." Fougères passed over a folded slip of paper.

"Good. You have arranged as to signals and so forth with Propotkin, no doubt. The men below?"

"She burns oil, m'sieur. Only three men there, one of them ours. All is arranged."

"Then carry out the plan. Give me five minutes' notice, and I'll open up the safe. When Propotkin comes aboard, shoot him and leave him. Come down, rifle what's in the safe, get away in the launch. Do you know how these gems are kept? In boxes?"

"In four morocco boxes, m'sieur."

"Very well. Make sure of Propotkin. That's all."

"Good luck, m'sieur!"

The steward withdrew, and the door closed. Durant smiled grimly to himself.

THE dinner was informal and greedy, with the oily, bejeweled partner of Kaparien very much in evidence. Durant was relieved when they adjourned to the smoking salon and ordered a taxicab.

"Drop me at the Bureau des Postes," he said, as they filed over the gangway to the wharf. "I have a few letters to mail—I'll walk on to the casino and join you."

So, ten minutes later, he dropped from the taxicab, which continued its way. Instead of seeking the post office, however, Durant crossed over to the prefecture of police, entered the brick building, and from a lounging gendarme inquired the whereabouts of the prefect. By sheer luck, that gentleman was now in his office, despite the hour—Deauville does not begin the day until darkness falls. Durant was ushered in, and gave his name to the fussily important prefect.

"I have a verbal message for you, M. le Prefect," he said, "from the subprefect of Paris, M. Ducasse."

"Ah! I know M. Ducasse very well," was the response. "A very good man indeed—what a pity that politics appoint the prefect of Paris! Otherwise, M. Ducasse

should have had the position long since. A message to me, you say? Verbal?"

Durant shrugged. "A matter of suspicion only, to be confided to your delicacy and tact, m'sieur. As M. Ducasse observed to me, there were few other men in France upon whom he could depend, in a matter so important, requiring such precision of management."

The pleased prefect fingered his whiskers and beamed.

"Most kind, most kind of the great M. Ducasse!" he said. "A compliment from him—ah!"

"Perhaps you are aware," said Durant, "that a certain shopkeeper here in Deauville acts as a distributor of drugs—chiefly cocaine?"

The prefect started slightly, but he was a good actor.

"We have had our eye on one or two men for some time," he said wisely if vaguely. "Yes indeed, while we awaited positive evidence. The man in question?"

"One Propotkin, who has a small shop."

The prefect could not conceal his astonishment here. "What? You are sure? Why, I myself play chess twice a week with M. Propotkin—"

"Permit me to remind you that this is merely a message," said Durant. "It is established that Propotkin retails drugs. What is far more important, however, is the suspicion that he is connected with an enterprise much more dangerous—the forgery of bank-notes."

The prefect flung out his hands. "Ah, these Russians!" he exclaimed tragically.

"Exactly," said Durant. "M. Ducasse requests that you will, during the coming week, have this man watched—very cautiously. He must not be alarmed or given any cause of suspicion. Perhaps M. Ducasse will come here in person to give you such information and assistance as is in his power. That is all, m'sieur, and I thank you."

"But you, m'sieur?" questioned the prefect, now profoundly alarmed and disturbed. "You are not a Frenchman—an Englishman, perhaps?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Durant, and laughed. "I am an American, at present the guest of M. Kaparien aboard his yacht, leaving tonight. If you will wire M. Ducasse, I think he will tell you that I am well known to him and trustworthy."

"Oh, no, no, not necessary at all," and the prefect waved his hands. "You will

not sit down and have a cigar? No? It is most kind of you, m'sieur—"

Durant was bowed out, even escorted to the front gate, and twice shook hands before he could get rid of the excited and eager prefect. Then, chuckling to himself, he headed for the casino, only a short distance away.

THE evening passed rapidly, furiously; Kaparien was kept busy pointing out famous actresses, courtesans, plungers, millionaires, titled folk, even a lone king more noted for his dissipation than his regal qualities. Only once came a break in the routine, before the last act of the opera being given on the wide, shallow stage before them. For the moment, Durant and Helen Glincka found themselves alone at the table. She leaned forward, her face suddenly tragic.

"Can't you stop it?" she said under her breath, imploringly. "It's terrible to think that this man who is entertaining us is to be killed before morning—that one word from either of us would stop it!"

Durant regarded her steadily. "He is a wolf, not a man," he responded, his gray eyes like ice. "His fate matters nothing to me; yours is everything. Would you prefer to let him live, then, and go on indefinitely in your slavery to Boris Makoff?"

She shivered a little—whether from the words, or from the bitter chill of his gaze, were hard to say.

"No," she said. "No. And yet—it seems—"

"It is none of your doing," said Durant inflexibly. "Instead of feeling pity for him, think of the hundreds who have been ruined at these baccarat tables in the rear rooms—to buy his yacht! Think of the women and children who have gone down into poverty—to set those diamonds on his hand! Think of the crime, the punishment that falls hardest on the innocent families of men, indirectly due to the place in which we sit—which puts the clothes on this man's back! Let him suffer. The more the better! The world's full of his kind. Killing him won't stop it, of course—but let him serve our turn, your turn! If he can serve you by dying, I'm more than satisfied."

"That's a man's viewpoint," she said. "Yet a word to him—"

Durant leaned over the table. "If you utter that word," he said quietly, "it means that you put me into prison—or else that

you put a bullet into me, as surely as though you pressed the trigger. You don't know all that's coming off this night, my dear. Now warn him if you like."

Her face paled as she met his gaze, comprehended his words, realized all they portended.

"I sha'n't warn him," she said quietly. "Would I do such a thing, when you're doing all this for me? Yet I'm sorry."

Durant shrugged. A moment later Kaparien rejoined them, and the final act of *Tosca* was on.

LUCK was with Durant that night. Then and later, in an unobtrusive manner, he exerted himself to strip the place of its artificial glitter and show it, to the eyes of Helen Glincka, sordid and naked; and chance sent a newspaper man from Paris, whom he knew slightly, to point out men and things with cynic notes. Here was a man whose brother, ruined at these very tables, had shot himself on the seaward terrace; here was an actress wearing the jewels for which a statesman had bartered honor and life; and so it went. A little later he met her sea-blue eyes for an instant, and read in them a message which drew a smile to his lips.

At one o'clock, with the night getting into full swing, they departed. Kaparien had drunk nothing, though he had gambled and won heavily; he seemed bored by the noise and confusion of the place, and on the way to the quay spoke of being at sea and the beauty of it. Durant almost liked him—for a moment. Then they were out and getting aboard the yacht, whose crew was standing by, ready. No tug was needed in this little harbor.

The Baronne bade them good night, and retired. Durant did likewise. Kaparien departed to change his clothes, and told his skipper to pull out at once; he himself would take the bridge when they were outside the jetty. So the three separated. Durant went down to his own cabin, pocketed his pistol, and waited by the open port.

Voices of men, rattle of winches, slow turnings of the engines; presently the *Elektra* was gently sliding out, until the houses and quay were gone as by magic. For a little the broad white beach glittered in the moonlight, then it too vanished, and as Durant's cabin was to port, the land vanished as the yacht headed out to the northward, across the broad estuary of the



"What's all this?" snapped the Russian. Durant knew there was but one way out. He fired point-blank.

Seine. Behind lay Trouville, ahead and to the right was Havre with its high headland, and to the left was the Atlantic and the Channel. They were off.

The night was clear and still, with little of the usual sea running. As he stared out at the glinting water, Durant suddenly realized his own inward tumult, and anger swept him—yet there it was. He rather considered himself hard-boiled, cynical, careless of others; in reality, he could not repress his actual self, could not always fight down the rush of gentler feelings that upsurged in him. And now, all in an instant, he abruptly flung overboard all his schemes and strode out of his cabin and down the passage. He knocked at the door of Helen Glincka's room.

"Yes?" came her voice.

"Dressed? Then be ready—I'll bring a chap down here in a few minutes," he told her. "Leave your door open, key on the outside. I'll lock you in. No time to talk."

HE departed hurriedly, cursing himself for a fool, and yet curiously glad of what he was about. Here, merely for a woman's whim, merely for a few words from Helen's lips, he was risking life and liberty needlessly, staking everything recklessly on a desperate gamble! Here in these moonlit waters, with the green Norman hills blended into the sky behind and the

lights of Trouville dim stars along the coast—he was making a fool of himself! And yet the mere resolve to do it had lifted a half-sensed burden from his heart.

He came back to his own cabin, and as he opened the door, Jean Fougères came hurriedly along the passage.

"M'sieur! M'sieur!" The steward spoke softly, swiftly. "It is time. In five minutes I take his coffee up to him—he drinks it, dies quickly. Be ready!"

The man glided away, leaving Durant stupefied. Poison! He had not suspected such a thing. The damnable cowardice of it appalled him. This was Propotkin's work, beyond doubt.

"Thank heaven I made my decision!" thought Durant.

He turned, darted up the ladder with furious anger spurring him. To think he had been so close to condoning this work, taking a hand in it! A man's killing, in a man's way, was one thing, but this was quite another thing—it angered him, sickened him, goaded him on his swiftly chosen course.

Gaining the deck, he ran forward, heading for the wheel-house and tiny chart-room, then espied the figure of Kaparien standing at the rail, examining something ahead through night-glasses.

"That you, Durant?" said the Greek. "Looks like a boat adrift—"

Durant caught his arm.

"Here! Come below with me instantly," he exclaimed, keeping his voice down. At the urgency of his tone, an exclamation broke from the other. "Can't tell you here—quick. Your life's in danger, man—they're all in it! Thank the Baronne, not me—she discovered it—come along, now—"

Urging the other man along, he half dragged him toward the after companion. Kaparien poured out questions, then acquiesced, evidently realizing something desperate was up. A moment later they were on the ladder. At the foot of it, Kaparien turned.

"What is it, Durant?" he demanded excitedly. "You can't mean—"

"Look out—behind you!" cried Durant.

As Kaparien whirled about, Durant's fist struck him solidly, terrifically, behind the angle of the jaw. The blow had weight. Kaparien flung out his arms and pitched headlong down the corridor.

DURANT dragged his senseless victim to Helen Glincka's cabin, flung open the door, and lifting Kaparien, laid him on the bunk. He straightened up and looked at the wide-eyed girl.

"Not dead but knocked out. Don't wake him up. Tell him I brought him here when he does wake up."

With this he was out again, locked the door, pocketed the key, and made hastily for the deck. Five minutes had not passed since his word with the steward, but he knew Fougères would be unable to wait out the time. And he was right. As he gained the deck, he almost collided with the steward, who bore a tray.

"No need of that now!" exclaimed Durant. "Go ahead—I've attended to Kaparien. Pass the word and strike! I'll be in the cabin. And look here! Don't be too open about shooting down Propotkin. Do it quietly, you understand?"

"Right, m'sieur!" Fougères promptly tossed his tray overboard. "Go, then!"

Durant made for the smoking-salon.

As he entered the tiny, luxurious, richly appointed little cabin and switched on the lights, a pistol-shot rang out up above. At the same instant, the throbbing turn of the engines ceased abruptly. There were no further shots. He could detect no outcry, no confusion, only dead silence. Beyond a doubt, everything had gone off like clockwork, the faithful men of the crew were taken by surprise, the yacht was captured.

Durant thought of Propotkin coming aboard from that drifting boat Kaparien had sighted, and grinned to himself. He did not intend to stave off the dope-handler's destiny.

No time to waste, now! He darted to the wall, jerked away the large painting of Venus, and laid it aside. There was revealed a large safe-knob, the safe itself being concealed by the wall-paneling. A single knob, no more—Kaparien evidently trusted greatly.

In his hand the folded paper given him by the steward, Durant worked at the knob. The combination, like the safe itself, was simple enough. In two minutes he pulled at the knob, and as the safe opened, a section of paneling opened with it. Before him was another steel door, which opened to his touch, and displayed an array of compartments and small drawers. In one compartment stood four red morocco boxes.

On these Durant seized. Spreading his handkerchief on the table, he emptied each box into it, throwing the boxes on the floor. The glittering, shimmering pile of pebbles was not large; he knotted the four corners of the handkerchief, then swiftly left the room and ran aft. He gained his own cabin, opened his bag, dropped the loot into it, then headed back for the smoking-salon. So far, so good—not a hitch anywhere. The *Elektra* was quietly drifting.

Back to the smoking-salon now—two men had just entered before him. They flung Durant a nod, obviously recognizing him, and plunged at the open safe.

"Where's Fougères?" asked Durant, lighting a cigarette at the table.

"Waiting above," replied one of them, stuffing bank-notes into his pockets. "That cursed Propotkin is just coming aboard. Lucky thing you warned us."

FOUGERES had spread the word, then!

Durant smiled and watched the two men at their work. Propotkin would be dropped, would be found later with the forged notes and die in his pockets—for he would need both hands to reach the deck of the yacht—and all would be lovely, so far as the police were concerned.

With vicious abruptness, everything changed in an instant.

Through the quiet ship tore a scream—a woman's shrill cry. Durant whirled about, jerking out his pistol—Helen's voice? A smashing, banging crash from somewhere

aft; then a sudden wild outbreak of sound came from the deck—a shot, another, a man's yell cut off midway by a bullet, shouts.

"Something wrong," exclaimed Durant, to the suddenly alert men. "Get up above—"

"So this is it, eh?"

The voice of Kaparien from the doorway—he had smashed his way out of the locked cabin. He stood there, pistol covering the three men, an ugly smile on his lips. "Hands up, all three of you! Quick, Durant—up!"

Durant obeyed, pointing his pistol up at the ceiling, and the other two men followed suit. Too late, Durant saw his mistake. There was iron in this Greek, and he had not counted on it sufficiently.

"Clever American, eh?" Kaparien's narrowed, dangerous gaze struck at Durant. "I suppose she's in on it too, since you're a friend of hers. Well—"

Behind Kaparien showed a darting shape—a low, gorilla-like figure. The crash of a shot rang out. Kaparien staggered, whirled around, and jerked sideways, half his head blown away. In his place showed the figure of Propotkin, glaring into the room, pistol in hand.

"What's all this, eh?" snapped the Russian. "That damned Fougères tried to round on me—the rest of you in it or not? Speak up, you American pig—"

Durant, his arms half lowered, knew there was but one way out now.

He fired point-blank, fired a second time, the deafening reports ringing in the little cabin with stunning force. What happened next was difficult to say. Both the other men flung themselves forward at Propotkin as the latter staggered back. Then, unexpectedly, the Russian's pistol vomited flame; he recovered, uttered a roar of brute ferocity, shot repeatedly.

It was all swift—swift! Durant fired a third time. Propotkin flung out his arms, whirled about, went down across the body of Kaparien. One of the other men was down, coughing out his life. The second was gone with a leap for the deck.

Realizing himself unhurt, Durant halted only to look at Propotkin and make sure the man was dead, then he, too, started for the deck. As he came up the companionway, a medley of shouts and orders broke out forward. Durant tossed his pistol over the rail, took two steps, came upon the body of the steward. Jean Fougères

lay, pistol in hand, shot through the head, beyond all further need of dope.

The quick explosions of a motor broke out upon the moonlit night, and from the side of the *Elektra* shot a small craft, heading away from her at high speed. Those who remained of the gang were off and away in Propotkin's craft.

Somewhere aboard must be two officers and two faithful men. Durant moved forward, and came upon them all in the bow, lashed side by side to the rail. They greeted him with a burst of shouts, and he worked at their lashings—not too rapidly. He did not want that small boat overhauled.

"Locked in a cabin—broke out," he exclaimed. "There was shooting below—what's it all about, captain? Where's M. Kaparien?"

"Murder, piracy, robbery!" said the skipper, rubbing his wrists. "And they're off—here, come below, m'sieur! We must see where M. Kaparien is—and the lady—"

They hastened below, and in the passage encountered Helen Glincka. A cry of relief broke from her at sight of Durant, and she swayed. Durant caught her, murmured a low word in her ear, and with a nod she went to her cabin. Durant followed the captain, the other three men at his heels, to the smoking-salon.

All four of them stood surveying the red scene before them, and the captain crossed himself as he stared. He turned to Durant. "You see, M. Durant? This hairy stranger came aboard in his boat; a gang was at work and had us trussed up. M. Kaparien came upon them as they rifled the safe, and opened fire. He killed two of the rascals—another shot him from behind. Ah! A brave man, this poor m'sieur! And now—what?"

"Back to Trouville at once," said Durant. "This is a matter for the police."

In five minutes the *Elektra* was heading south again to Trouville.

IN the cold light of dawn, the prefect of police at Trouville stood in the smoking-salon of the *Elektra*. Two of his men were busy writing; on the table were ranged loot taken from the dead thief, with the die and the packet of forged notes that had been found in Propotkin's coat pockets. Durant motioned toward Helen Glincka, who stood by the door.

"Mme. la Baronne, I presume, may retire?" he asked. "Since she was locked in

The Trail of Death

her cabin and knew nothing, she might better be left out of the proceedings, m'sieur. It would be a graceful act of courtesy, such as has made the name of Frenchmen renowned."

This is a touch which not even a police official can resist. The prefect turned to Helen with a bow.

"By all means. We have Madame's story, we have her Paris address in case of need—that is all. Madame, if I can be of any assis'ance in this regretful crisis—"

"I'll accompany her to Paris by the morning train," said Durant. "That is, unless you have need of me—"

The Baroness departed. The prefect fingered his voluminous beard a moment, then shook his head.

"I think not—you did not break out of your cabin and release the prisoners until after it was all over. What need of evidence? The thing speaks for itself. This poor M. Kaparien was brave, but foolish. He should not have attacked these others. See! He put two bullets into Propotkin, killed another man with his third. What valor! If, M. Durant, you will take a message to Paris for me, there is no need of detaining you except to get your statement."

"Gladly," said Durant. "The message?"

"Tell M. Ducasse what has happened here. If he wishes to put his men to work on these forged notes, if he wants to get in others of the gang, well and good; I shall keep this phase of the matter from the newspapers until tomorrow, by which time I shall hear from him. Eh?"

"Excellent, m'sieur. Then, with your permission, I'll pack."

Durant went to his own cabin. He pulled out his bag, looked into it, saw the lumpy bundle of his handkerchief at the bottom. He quietly drew other things over it, then straightened up. A smile touched his lips.

"So all's clear, here are the stones for Boris—to buy my way into his den!—and by this afternoon I'll be on the inside of things. But I wonder—I wonder what M. Ducasse will say when I telephone this message to him!"

His smile became a grin.

"Beside Henri IV," the next story in this scintillating series, introduces Henry of Navarre and the beautiful Viennese opera singer, with a breath-taking climax. In the next issue.

Le Jeune of the Ax

By

L. P. HOLMES

"SO that is Le Jeune?" Corporal Nevin, of the Northwest Mounted, mused the interrogation aloud.

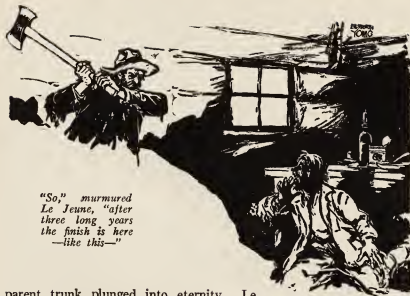
"Ay," answered Markle, senior partner in the logging firm of Markle & Hays. "Ay, that is Le Jeune—'Le Jeune of the Ax.'"

At the edge of a thicket of berry brush the two men stood. Fifty feet away, in the approximate center of a circular clearing, the bole of a giant fir soared up in graceful symmetry—a good hundred feet of perfect, tapering cylinder before the first branch was reached. Then the top fluffed out into silver-gray fronds transformed by height and distance into a fairy tracery against the sky.

At the foot of this forest giant labored Le Jeune. A tremendous man was this Le Jeune of the Ax. The width of his shoulders was amazing, and the leanness of his waist and hips still more noticeable by the contrast. Slightly bowed were those shoulders, with that slope which bespeaks extraordinary strength and endurance. His arms were long, his wrists and hands large; just now they were swinging with indescribable ease a straight-handled, double-bitted woodsman's ax.

With machine-like regularity the glittering steel rose and fell. The blows were easy and unhurried—yet with each one the ax sank to the eye. Le Jeune's breathing kept time to the measured blows, each breath ending as the ax struck, in a sharp "huh" of expiration.

A premonitory shiver ran up the great tree. The sharp crack of bursting fibers carried clearly to the ears of the watchers. Up in the branches of the lofty crest arose a whispering like farewell ere they and the



"So," murmured
Le Jeune, "after
three long years
the finish is here
—like this—"

*Timber! You'll
surely enjoy this
colorful drama
of the lumber
country and the
North Woods.*

Illustrated by
Ellsworth Young

parent trunk plunged into eternity. Le Jeune ceased his labors and stepped aside. He lifted his head and sent a mellow, deep-toned call echoing through the aisles of the forest:

"Timber-r-r!"

Markle caught Corporal Nevin by the arm and pointed at a white, peeled stake yards away from the bottom of the tree.

"Mark that stake yonder," he exclaimed. "See, the falling timber will drive it!"

The tree was no longer perpendicular. It was toppling slowly. Now the stricken top whirled downward in a widening and speeding arc. There was a rush of suddenly displaced air. Then came the crash of final surrender. Against the sky a gap loomed emptily.

Markle and Corporal Nevin approached the huge Le Jeune, who was now for the first time cognizant of their presence. The woodsman, leaning on his ax, eyed their approach calmly—almost stupidly, thought Nevin.

"Le Jeune," said Markle, "meet Corporal Nevin. Corporal Nevin is the new man in charge of this territory."

Le Jeune held forth a great hand.

"I am honored, m'sieu," he acknowledged quietly.

"That was cleverly done," remarked the policeman. "The tree drove the stake perfectly."

"It is the cunning of the ax, m'sieu," shrugged Le Jeune.

"See here," said Markle, laying out five matches side by side on the stump of the fallen tree. "Split 'em for him, Pierre! I'm not asking you to show off, but I've been telling Corporal Nevin that you were

the best axman in the North Woods, and I want you to prove it."

A ghost of a smile played about Le Jeune's face as he stepped up to the stump and lifted his ax. Five times it rose and fell smoothly.

"The test is hardly fair," said the woodsman. "It is too easy."

Nevin stared and shook his head. The accuracy of the blows was uncanny. Each match was split neatly. Nevin began to appreciate the fact that the quality in Le Jeune he had taken for stupidity was more of a contemplative, unhurried serenity. He realized he was confronted by a personality unique but pertinent.

"You win!" remarked Nevin to Markle as the two of them moved off to meet others of Markle's woods crew. "I haven't the slightest doubt but that Le Jeune is all you claimed him to be."

Markle nodded gravely.

"A very exceptional man, and as picturesque a character as you'll find in several days of long travel."

CORPORAL NEVIN of the Northwest Mounted was a new man in the Rising River country. He had been sent up from the Post at Deeping Lake, and being of a methodical and very thorough turn of mind, he was making a general survey of the immediate surrounding territory. He was also making it a point to meet and mentally card-index all of the inhabitants with whom he could come in contact.

Previous experience and serious advice

from an old-timer in the force had taught Nevin the value of such a proceeding. The Rising River territory was a virtual frontier and was peopled with men whose natures were as wild, untrammelled and primitive as their surroundings. Hot blood flamed to the heat of violence under very little provocation. As a result, serious work for the Mounted police was a regular occurrence. And it was obvious that in searching for some individual at outs with the law, the task would be rendered much simpler if the pursuer had more than a printed picture of the pursued to guide him. The lumber-camps of the vicinity were hotbeds of violence and for this reason Markle was conducting Corporal Nevin personally through the holdings of his company.

Late in the evening the officer returned to his cabin at Peterbrook, the little lumber town on Rising River. He had met many men that day, but such was the power of his trained memory that he retained a fairly reliable mind-picture of every man he had met.

There had been big men and small men, short and tall men, broad men and otherwise, but now, seated in comfort before the open hearth of his cabin, his mind turned most readily to retrospective contemplation of a gorilla-like shape who handled a razor-edged ax with such uncanny wizardry as to lay a common match in two equal halves.

"Le Jeune of the Ax," he mused; "there is poetry for you! Poetry in the title—poetry in the man. But, Lord—what a fiend he would be in a fight, with that ax of his for a weapon!"

IT was five days later that Corporal Nevin received his first call to act in his official capacity. A drunken woodsman, more than usually deep in his cups, had returned home to his cabin and in a moment of alcoholic frenzy had beaten his wife so severely her life was despaired of. The woman was under the care of the settlement doctor and somewhere in the Northland the murderer was fleeing from the wrath which was sure to follow.

When Nevin reached the scene of the crime he found several groups of people standing about in whispered conference, while inside the cabin the doctor battled for the woman's life. Nevin made inquiry and finally from Benvou, the withered little Frenchman who filed the saws for Markle's

upper camp, received a coherent account of what happened.

"It was late last evening, m'sieu," explained Benvou. "This drunken lout Marcellin went home along the trail which leads past my shop. He was very drunk, m'sieu, and staggered from side to side as he walked. Would that the good God had struck him dead before he ever reached home, m'sieu, for then his good wife would even now be alive and well, instead of slowly dying from his cowardly blows. Such mercy was not to be, however.

"Shortly after he had passed my Angelle and I heard the woman screaming. We ran to her aid, but were too late. When we arrived, she lay there on the floor before us. Her wicked husband, no doubt sobered by his dastardly act, had fled. That is all I know, m'sieu, except,"—here the little Benvou turned up his palms and shrugged,—"except, that Marcellin will answer dearly to Le Jeune if the poor woman dies."

"Le Jeune!" demanded Nevin. "Why Le Jeune?"

"Ah, and did you not know, m'sieu, that the woman is half-sister to Le Jeune—Le Jeune of the Ax?"

"His half-sister! Le Jeune has vowed vengeance then, eh?"

Benvou shrugged again.

"Out behind the cabin you will find him. See for yourself."

There was nothing more to be gained by further questioning or search about the cabin. The case was plain enough and Nevin's future actions simple. He had only to pick up Marcellin's trail and then fulfill by rapid chase the motto of the Northwest police force: "Get your man." He was genuinely disturbed, however, at Benvou's hint of the matter taking on the atmosphere of a blood feud, with Le Jeune out to avenge the impending death of his half-sister. He circled the cabin as Benvou directed and found Le Jeune, remorselessly grim in face and eye, huddled over his beloved ax, while a whetstone purred throatily across the shining steel.

Le Jeune looked up as Nevin approached and nodded in silence. Then he bent again to his work. There was something about the finality of his actions which chilled Nevin.

"They tell me you intend following Marcellin and wreaking vengeance upon him. Is that true, Le Jeune?" demanded the policeman abruptly.

Le Jeune nodded slowly.



*Corporal Nevin had fulfilled his vow
as surely as Le Jeune had fulfilled his!*

"If she dies, m'sieu,—and the good doctor says she will,—then yes. Marcellin shall answer to me—to Le Jeune of the Ax."

"I cannot permit it, Le Jeune. You must let the law take care of Marcellin."

"The law, m'sieu? Hah, but the law is slow and sometimes uncertain, while this,"—he held the ax out at arm's-length,—
"this pretty tool never fails!"

And he fell to crooning afresh over the ax.

"Perhaps you misunderstand, Le Jeune!" Corporal Nevin was trying desperately to impinge some recognition of his authority upon the implacable attitude of the woodsman. "I—I am the law, and I say you shall *not* take the privilege of exacting payment for the act in your own hands! I am leaving within the half-hour on Marcellin's trail and I promise you he shall hang just as surely as the sun shall rise tomorrow. Does not that satisfy you?"

"It is m'sieu who does not understand," replied Le Jeune gravely. "See—the good doctor approaches and his news is in his face!" A sudden mist dimmed the soft luster of the giant's eyes and a plaintive note crept into his voice. "Little Jean, my little Jean, is gone—and, m'sieu, Marcellin must pay!"

Le Jeune reared abruptly to his tremendous height and took the announcement of

his half-sister's death with a stoicism which was only partly deceiving. One look at his averted face, and the breaking of his simple heart lay plain. About the worn handle of his ax his huge hands were gripped until the knuckles showed stark and white. A single smothered gasp of grief and he lumbered straight out into the north forest, not unlike a great wounded bear seeking solitude and quiet wherewith to heal his hurts.

Disappointed and chagrined, Corporal Nevin turned back toward his own cabin to make ready for the trail. He realized keenly that a body-racking chase lay before him. He must not only run down the murderer Marcellin, but he must also accomplish the act before Le Jeune fulfilled his vow. He knew Headquarters would hold him responsible for every angle of the matter, and should Le Jeune cheat him of his quarry there would be some difficult explanations to make.

As he passed the cabin where lay the dead, little Benvou ran out and accosted him.

"Le Jeune—he is gone?" queried the saw-filer.

"Yes, he is gone. And he is a fool, Benvou. For should he find Marcellin before I do, then it will be he and not Marcellin who must answer to the law."

"Even so, he will be satisfied. For in the things of life that count, m'sieu, we do not mind the cost," replied little Benvou sagely. "Your law will not frighten Le Jeune when he has fulfilled his vow!"

And Corporal Nevin, as he labored swiftly over his preparations knew how truthful had been the words of Benvou the saw-filer. Le Jeune, child of the forest, would recognize only one law, the primitive one. "An eye for an eye"—the law of the fang!

Moments later—only moments—Nevin swung away on the northward trace, little knowing whither the urge of duty would take him, but determined to see the end at all costs.

Yet even as he started, Corporal Nevin knew a premonition of failure. The law of man versus the primal law! The winner—which?

DEEDS of valor, of endurance, of persistence, of unwavering perseverance; these things are epic in the North Woods. In a land where a man's physical fitness is the preponderant factor in his fight for existence, it is but natural that the worship mankind is prone to bestow on accomplishment should be toward physical prowess.

With the departure of Le Jeune and Corporal Nevin, a new epic was in the making. Not a week later hardy woodsmen were arguing it across the bunkhouse stoves in the evenings. At the great camp at the junction of the Beaver and the Athabasca, liquid-tongued voyageurs and trappers discussed its many angles and wagers were placed on the outcome.

Somewhere out to the north slunk the killer, Marcellin. Driven by a dogging fear and by the hellish punishment of a long-dormant conscience at last awakened—cursed with mocking shadows and the scorn and contempt of all men, Marcellin drove himself onward in a madness of despair that knew no physical limits.

North he went and west, then farther north. The Three River Country he traversed. He circled the vast shores of Great Slave Lake and gazed on the southern shores of the Great Bear. Then south and east he fled into the lake and river wilderness of upper Saskatchewan; but gradually, as though impelled by some dominant force he could neither fathom nor resist, the murderer was working back toward the scene of his crime. One day some three years after the killing, toward the latter

end of the driest year to be recalled by the oldest inhabitant of Peterbrook, Marcellin beached a battered canoe on a spit of snowy gravel jutting out into the swift reaches of Rising River.

Some thirty miles south lay Peterbrook, while five miles north was the little fur post of Corbaleau. Because the river flowed north and he was worn and exhausted from the long chase, Marcellin went north to Corbaleau.

Several hundred yards from Corbaleau he was forced to portage, for here began a stretch of white water which no canoe could live through. The fall of the river over a distance of some mile and a half was excessive, and in consequence the velocity of the flow was terrific. The gorge narrowed to a scant sixty feet and was ribbed with the fangs of black spray-wet rocks. Several lives had the Corbaleau Rapids claimed and never, in the memory of man, had anyone piloted a canoe through them safely.

Just why the little post of Corbaleau had grown into being was hard to say, for certainly accessibility had nothing to do with the choice of location. Canoe travel direct to the Post was impossible, even though the waters of Rising River foamed by within a stone's-throw of the center of the place. Probably some nomad of the forest, enamored by the majesty and appalling power of the rapids, had built the first cabin on the site, this being later augmented by others until Corbaleau became of sufficient size to be noted on the map.

Here it was that on a late September day Marcellin halted to purchase some meager supplies. He did this without danger. Few men who had known him would have recognized him now. Gaunt, haggard, bewhiskered, his clothes filthy and worn from the thousands of weary miles the three-year chase had forced him over, he had changed and aged appallingly.

The shopkeeper with whom he dealt eyed him casually and without especial interest. Wanderers of that type were common in Corbaleau; they came and went as did the four winds of heaven. If they bought, and paid for what they bought, Le Fevre the shopkeeper was satisfied.

Marcellin halted at the door as he was about to leave.

"Is there a town of Peterbrook near here?" he questioned, his voice rough from disuse.

"Peterbrook?" answered Le Fevre. "But yes—there is a Peterbrook some forty miles

south. It is the place where the great mills of the lumber company are. The river is the most direct route. You have a canoe, yes?"

Marcellin shook his head in negation.

"No, I have no canoe. I am traveling afoot."

Le Fevre stood in the doorway and watched Marcellin and his pack of pro-

should spring into being it might easily carry with it a terrible red threat for Corbaleau. Le Fevre turned back to the dusky depths of his shop, humming a sprightly tune as a corrective to his frame of mind.

Then another shadow darkened his door.

He was a huge man, this second newcomer—shaggy as a bear. Le Fevre marked his ragged garments, his huge hands blackened and hardened from mighty toil. And most astonishing of all, one of



Last of all came Nevin, carrying in his arms the aged woman who had led the praying.

visions vanish into the forest. Le Fevre, shrewd and quick-eyed as a cat, was thinking. Why should this man lie? For the signs of canoe travel were strong upon him—the knees of his buckskin trousers were shiny and black from much kneeling in the stern of a craft while on the heel of his hands the paddle callous was plain to see. Ay—plainly the man was a liar!

LE FEVRE shrugged and forgot the incident, for a puff of wind, dry and hot, had struck his cheek, and plainly to his nostrils came the odor of resinous wood-smoke. To the west the sky was murky with bluish haze. A frown furrowed the brow of the shopkeeper. For the past week a great expanse of forest to the westward had been raging with flames, conditions for a great conflagration being ripe. The exceptionally dry year had augmented a condition always existent in the forest in late fall and Le Fevre, despite a normally optimistic and cheery nature, was uneasy. If a heavy wind from the west

those hands carried carefully and with remarkable ease, a highly polished double-bitted woodsman's ax.

"I am Le Jeune—Le Jeune of the Ax," growled the newcomer. "I seek a man, m'sieu. He passed through here, did he not?"

It was an ambiguous question, as many men passed through Corbaleau. Yet Le Fevre, face to face with the principal actor in a tableau of life which was the chief item of talk wherever men gathered together, knew beyond a doubt to what man his questioner referred.

"He was here, m'sieu. He left within the half-hour past. He is heading toward Peterbrook, m'sieu, traveling afoot. He—"

But Le Fevre was talking to an empty room. Le Jeune was already padding swiftly to the south, his shoulders hunched slightly, his eyes seeking, seeking.

HIGH on the point of a ridge some five miles south of Corbaleau, Scotty Maupin had at one time built a cabin. A near-

by spring furnished abundant water, wood was there for the taking, and the elevation rendered some surcease against the persecution of mosquitoes, black flies and other winged pests. Indeed the location was ideal and for as long as five months Scotty was satisfied.

Then the old urge began to stir. Alaska was broadcasting a new strike, and Scotty, always a wanderer, left his cozy cabin for the doubtful blandishments of the trail. It was to the long-unopened door of this cabin that Marcellin finally dragged his famished and worn-out body.

The stove and a few scattered utensils were foul with rust, but Marcellin was not over-squeamish. Soon the fragments of a meal were before him. He wolfed at the food, his caution gone, his single mental and physical desire seemingly the assimilation of nourishment.

And thus Le Jeune of the Ax came upon him.

"So, so," murmured Le Jeune half aloud, his voice as silken as the purr of a cat. "After three long years the finish is here, almost at the grave of her whom you murdered. And the finish—like this—"

He moved across the room, his ax swung high. Marcellin, pallid, craven, groveled on his knees and sought frantically for words of mercy that would not come. He did scream once—a hoarse, animal-like sound. . . .

LE FEVRE the shopkeeper was sleeping ill. He tossed from side to side and muttered in his sleep. Strange, stifling nightmares dogged him and set his unconscious nerves on edge. A window facing the west was open and through it, in ever-thickening clouds, poured black pungent smoke. A quickening wind droned and wailed about the cabin and a rising roar was plainly discernible.

Le Fevre breathed deeply, choked in the swirling atmosphere, and awoke. One look he took at the clouds of smoke and at the terrible menace of the sullen red circle closing in upon the town, and his wild shouts of alarm echoed through the buildings of sleeping Corbaleau.

Immediately the empty street began to fill. Men shouted much and uselessly. Women, fluttering above broods of half-dressed children, scolded and threatened, the fearsome note of hysteria in their shrill voices. Here and there arose the whimpering of babies in arms.

Then out of the smoke and mists of the west lunged two men. One, a giant of a man with tremendous shoulders, was in the lead, his hands behind his back and held together with gleaming circlets of steel. Behind came the red-jacketed figure of a Northwest Mounted policeman, gun ready in one hand—in the other a double-bitted woodsman's ax, the smooth gleam of the steel now clouded with crimson. Corporal Nevin of the Mounted had fulfilled his vow just as surely as Le Jeune had fulfilled his!

Le Jeune heaved a great breath and stared back stolidly at the speeding approach of the flames. Nevin, swift in his authority, seized upon one of the men.

"Why stay here, you fools?" he stormed. "Get the women and children across the river while there is yet time!"

"Cross the river—cross the river—" The man's answering laugh was almost maniacal. "It is you who are the fool! Whoever crossed the rapids of Corbaleau? No one, m'sieu, no one."

"But either above or below the rapid. Surely there is a crossing there."

"The crossing—yes, there is a crossing. But the fire is there before us! We are trapped, m'sieu."

Nevin urged his prisoner to the edge of the river and stared down at the mad chaos of the rapid. He turned back toward the fire, his face going slowly white.

"My God," he muttered, "it's true! Trapped like rats! And there are women—and children!"

He pulled a key from his pocket and fitted it to the manacles.

"This may be the finish, Le Jeune," he said soberly. "At best it will be every man for himself."

Le Jeune flexed his freed arms and held out a huge hand.

"My ax, m'sieu," he requested quietly. "Quickly—Le Jeune will bridge the rapid!"

"What? Impossible, man!"

"No, not impossible, m'sieu. The big fir, m'sieu—it will reach to the other shore. Le Jeune will fall it."

Nevin followed Le Jeune's gesture, then drew a swift breath. The tree—a tremendous fir—stood close to the edge of the river. The enormous bole glowed faintly ruddy in the brightening glow of the flames. Far above was the dark mass of foliage.

"It would do—but you have not time,

Le Jeune! Why, it is more than a yard through—and those flames are hardly a quarter of an hour away!" Nevin's words were incredulous, his tone strained.

"No matter, m'sieu—I, I am Le Jeune of the Ax. Come, my ax—or the lives of the women and children are on your head! Quickly, m'sieu, you are tempting the Devil! Quickly!"

Like a man stupefied, Nevin held out the ax. Le Jeune raced to the tree and measured it carefully for the fall. His jacket and shirt he tossed aside and stood forth stripped to the waist, his giant torso strangely white against the mahogany tan of his face and throat. Then the first "*chock*" of the falling ax sounded sharply through the sullen mutter of the flames.

RAPIDLY the word spread. Hope, flaming anew in hearts but shortly despairing, sent a faint cheer rippling over the assemblage. But as men measured the size of the tree and the speed of the approaching flames, despair crept in again.

Close about they gathered, men and women with children and babies in arms. Some chattered volubly; others were whitely silent. A withered old crone dropped to her knees and began to pray. Others joined her, until a good half of the simple folk were on their knees.

Nevin, bowing his head that the broad brim of his hat might shield his face from the encroaching heat, watched the axman's progress and computed their chances.

Already a great white slash gaped in the side of the tree. Le Jeune was working like one inspired, the massive thews of his arms and shoulders standing out like corded rope under the terrific power of each blow. Like magic the cut widened—deepened.

Minutes passed, slow, stifling minutes, with the seconds dropping bludgeon-like on Nevin's tight-strung nerves. A great billow of turgid smoke swept down upon them. Around him Nevin heard people choking and gasping. He had to fight for his own breath and he marveled at Le Jeune—for the steady *chock, chock* of the ax never lessened.

The air cleared slightly and he could see again, but the heat was oven-like, searing. Sweat was streaming from Le Jeune's broad back. Clear to Nevin came the laboring of the giant's breath.

A hundred yards away a great pine roared into flame, a blasting pillar of torrid fury. Nevin staggered from the sheer

impact of its devastating blast. It seemed to him his entire being was smoldering.

And still the ax—*chock, chock, chock!*

A cinder, livid, viperish, swirled out of the smoke cloud and clung like a poisonous spider to one of Le Jeune's bare shoulders. Immediately the naked flesh was smoking. But Le Jeune—unheeding, god-like—labored madly on.

With a rasping sob of horror, Nevin sprang to him and swept the cinder aside. Where it had rested a great blister had risen.

"You wonderful brute!" muttered Nevin brokenly. "You wonderful brute!"

Then came the creak and crack of wood-fibers. A slow shudder rippled through the length of the tree. Pallid faces lifted to the wonder of it and began counting the strokes of the ax.

Again the hungry, desperate steel sank home—and again!

High against the murky sky the crest of the tree was tipping. Then and only then did Le Jeune drop his ax. A gulp and he staggered aside.

Valiantly he straightened and lifted his head. In one single word he voiced his splendid victory and defiance to the ravening flames. Mellow and deep-toned as of yore, it carried salvation to the cowering group:

"*Timber-r-r!*"

HARDLY had the fallen tree settled from its rebound than Nevin was among the people, directing, hurrying—urging. Across the fearful chasm of the rapid, women stepped bravely, secure in their new-found safety. Children followed, timorously but surely. Then the men, and last of all, Nevin, carrying in his arms the aged woman who had led the praying.

So it was the people of Corbaleau passed to the security of the farther shore, in the thoughtlessness of their salvation forgetting the great and simple heart which had labored beyond the limit of human flesh for that salvation.

Alone, with none to watch, Le Jeune slumped slowly, falling not unlike the great tree had fallen a moment before—falling to a last resting-place. Had one been close enough to see, one might have marked a smile upon those pain-racked features, might have marked the single moment of ineffable peace which came as the spirit of an indomitable soul plumbed the depths!

Le Jeune of the Ax was dead.

"Up!" said Kennedy curtly. "You, Injun, stand facing the wall."

The Bar E Bar Bandit

By ALLAN
HAWKWOOD

Illustrated by William Molt



IN the heart of Salvador, walled around with buildings, was the old corral of Juan Vaca, now serving as a parking-place at need. Tom Enright came to the open gate and stopped short. His big car had been inside here for an hour, but he was not looking at the car. He looked at the broad back of Sheriff Gonzales, and over his shoulder at the face of Juan Vaca. And Vaca saw him.

"But no, señor," said Vaca, in reply to a question. "If I had seen such a man, would I not tell you? *Madre de Dios!* You say he is a bandit?"

"Train-robber," said the Sheriff, who, though of native descent, was as fully American as Enright himself. "He was seen near San Tomás pueblo; then he plumb vanished. They figured he might have got to town, as he had asked one *hombre* for a ride. Five hundred reward on him."

Vaca shrugged. "I would like the money, señor, but I have not seen him."

The Sheriff turned, as Enright came into the corral.

"Hello, Tom," he said, with a nod. "I'm lookin' for a *hombre* last seen along the highway near San Tomás. Train-robber and bandit. Hurt more or less. Red hair, ragged clothes, arm in a sling. See anything of him as you came into town?"

Enright smiled lazily. He was tall and spare, and despite his puttees and khaki looked the rancher all over. As well he might, since the Bar-E-Bar over in the Soldados was one of the best ranches in Salvador County.

"Reckon I can't help you out none, Gonzales," he said. "Bad man, huh?"

"One of the gang that held up the Limited last week, and they blew the Dorado City bank yesterday in broad daylight—and got away," responded the Sheriff. "Two of the gang were caught at Albuquerque early this morning, but the other three have lost themselves."

"Sounds interesting," commented Enright. A certain peculiar intonation in his voice, an odd look in his level gray eyes, caused the Sheriff to look sharply at him.

"What's the matter, Tom? Look sort of down in the mouth. Trouble?"

"Nope. Had an argument about some freight shipments."

This stirring novelette of wild days and nights in one of the still untamed corners of the Southwest is one of the most quick-moving and thrilling we have ever published. Be sure to read this flame-vivid tale of hard riding and swift shooting.



"Hear you're going to be married right soon now."

"We're fixing to," said Enright, and for a moment the rather harsh outlines of his face softened. "If everything goes right. Mary aint set it to a day, yet."

"Well," and the Sheriff turned, "I've known Jake Piatt ever since he took up land out in them hills and turned it into a ranch. A better *hombre* never lived, if he aint crossed; but cross him—and *Díos!* He's sure what they call opinionated. Well, so long."

JUAN VACA closed the gate after the Sheriff and stood against it, staring. Enright looked at him and smiled slightly.

"All right, *caballero*. Feed him? How much in all?"

The other shrugged, and caught the gold-piece Enright tossed to him.

"How you feeling, feller?" asked Enright, turning to the car. A shock of red hair appeared over the side of the tonneau, and the freckled, sunburned face under the shock was grinning.

"Congratulations! And thanks. Where do we go from here?"

"Out o' town. Better get back under that there blanket. I bought a hat for you, so's you can sit up like a man once we leave town. All right, Juan. Open the gate."

Enright got into the front seat of his big car, Juan opened the gate, and he drove out of town along the Sierra road, past the acequias and truck gardens, until they were through Lobo Cañon and out on the open mesa trail that led straight off to the Soldados. Then, once well out of town, he halted the car and turned to face the ragged, happy-go-lucky gentle-

man in the rear. An expression of amused tolerance filled his eyes.

"Well," he said, "you're fed, watered and bandaged, and out of immediate danger."

"And I'm sure grateful, Mister," said the other fervently. "I heard what that Sheriff said, and—"

"Shucks, I'm askin' no questions," said Enright, though his eyes bored into the other man with a peculiarly steely glitter. "I find a feller hurt and needing help—and if I take him in, I don't turn him over to no officer in a hurry. However, you done said something that interested me a whole lot—about a gent you wanted to find in this part of the country."

"Uh-huh—thanks." The other took the makings Enright handed him, and rolled a cigarette deftly enough. "Heard 'em call you Tom—well, Tom, one o' my friends wanted me to find a feller. He has a ranch over this way somewheres, and his name is Enright."

He paused to lick his cigarette.

"Yeah," said Enright. "And why does your friend want to see him?"

RED grinned. "Personal reasons. I aint holdin' out on you, Tom—the reasons are real personal! We're the bunch that done held up that train, and blew that bank likewise. We got euchered out all around, didn't make a cent out of the train and lost what we got out of the bank—it was blamed hot work, lemme tell you! We were up against it all around. So Dallas,—that's Dallas Jack Logan,—he says could I locate this Enright gent, we'd be taken care of all right."

"Jack Logan? Never heard of such a name in my life," said Enright, but something in his steely eyes belied the words. "Did he give you a message for Enright?"

The bandit met his gaze, and suddenly comprehended.

"My gosh!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you're him?"

"Uh-huh."

Enright looked steadily at the red-headed man, waiting.

The latter scratched a match, lighted his cigarette, and appeared flabbergasted. He did not look like a bad man at all: he had a cheerful smile, twinkling eyes, and a wholesome air which belied his reputation.

"I wasn't lookin' to find a man like you," he said evasively. Enright's lips tightened a moment.

"Why not a man like me?"

"Well, durn it all—"

"Never mind fishing around. Deliver that message and do it quick!"

"All right, but I'm durned sorry about it, Tom," said the outlaw. "Dallas, he says if I can locate this here Enright, to tell him that his brother is in heap big trouble and wants a hand. There you are," he added, rather sheepishly. "And if I'd known it was you, I'm danged if I'd have given the message!"

"Why not?" said Enright sharply.

"Because, after all you've done for me, I wouldn't drag you into it!" came the defiant response. "Listen—you're a white man, *sabe*? Dallas aint. He's a crook. So's Len Briggs, the other feller."

"He's my brother," said Enright.

"I don't give a durn if he is; he don't stack up alongside you," said the other hotly. "If I was you, I'd let that there message slide and leave Dallas and Len alone."

"Can't do that," said Enright. He rolled a cigarette for himself, meantime studying his companion with sharp glances. "Hm! If you think so poorly of Dallas, how come you were so set on delivering the message? Why didn't you hunt safety?"

"I done promised 'em I would."

"You're a hell of a crook!" said Enright, and smiled. "How long you been blowing safes and holding up trains?"

"Since last week." Red grinned. "Kennedy's my name—I been working with the Katy outfit down in the Panhandle. I met up with Dallas and another feller from the range, and we got hitting up the tequila pretty hard, and first thing I knew I was helping hold up the train. So when I'd got that far, I judged I might's well take a crack at a bank with the boys, but we didn't have no luck. Dallas and Len Briggs, they claimed to be experts, but gosh! Things got balled up pretty bad."

ENRIGHT'S lips twitched, despite the situation. The idea of these rank amateurs tackling a train and a bank, and wondering why they failed, had its humorous side.

"Well, how long you aim to stick with 'em?" he demanded.

"Me? None no more for me—I'm done!" said Red Kennedy with fervor. "I got a bullet through my arm, half the State lookin' for me, and a reward offered. Yes sir, if I get out safe, I'm done! My

contract with them birds ended when I done delivered the message, so that lets me out."

"All right," said Enright unexpectedly. "I need a top hand on the Bar-E-Bar, and you look to me like you might fill the bill. If you want the job, say so."

KENNEDY'S jaw dropped, and his eyes goggled at Enright.

"Huh?" he gasped. "You mean it, Tom—me?"

"Sure. Besides which, I need somebody I can trust—and I need 'em bad. I can trust you."

"Me? After I done said I was a crook?"

Enright laughed shortly. "Aint my brother a crook? Come on, feller—you want that job or not? Usual wages, and a darned sight more work to do than usual."

"You're on," said Kennedy. "I can't believe it's true—but if it is, you're on!"

"All right. Clap on that hat and get up here beside me. Where am I to find Dallas?"

"He said that he and Briggs would be hiding out in a place they knew. He'd been up in this country when he was a kid. This place was called Spanish Cañon, and lay away up in the hills—why, what's the matter?"

Enright did not answer the question, but his face took on the peculiar tensed expression the Sheriff had noted in town.

"You don't know this range, do you, Red?" he asked presently.

"Not a-tall."

Enright lifted one hand and pointed at the four peaks of the Soldados, dead ahead.

"There's my range—this side the two westward Soldados, and out around. See them hills off to the left? They're the Eagletails; no water, bad country, lots of poison and loco weed, running off into the desert. Spanish Cañon lays there. It's a big box cañon."

"Anybody live there?" asked Red shrewdly.

"Uh-huh," assented Enright, but did not say who. He pointed to the second and third of the Soldados. "About there is Piatt's outfit, the Running M. He's got pretty big holdings adjoining mine on the east. Sulphur Springs lays off beyond, just the other side of the Soldados. It aint as big as Salvador, but being closer, gets most of the trade around. Right over the other side of them four peaks, to the left where

my range curves around, is Jim Starr and the A-W—him and me don't get along any too good. There's the general layout of the range for you."

"Thanks," said Red Kennedy. "When you come from the general layout to more particular items, I reckon we'll get at the root of the difficulty. No use beatin' about the bush, Tom. I done heard all the Sheriff said, about you getting married and so on. Dallas' being here is going to crab your chances, huh?"

"No."

FOR a long moment Enright was silent.

"No," he went on, "not with Mary Piatt—but it's going to do a lot of damage other ways. I expect you and me had better light out for the Bar-E-Bar, get some hosses, and go visit Spanish Cañon. Can't make it with a car—some ridge rock road over that-a-way would cut the tires off any machine in a mile. Bad enough with a hoss. We can get home and get over there by dark. What say?"

"Sure," assented Red. "I'll crawl in back again and get me some sleep on the way out and be fresh by tonight. Who lives in Spanish Cañon, anyhow?"

"Why," said Enright, slowly, "Gogetit for one—Johnny Gogetit."

"Oh!" commented Kennedy. "I get it too. Injun, huh?"

"Some Injun," corrected Enright. "He and an old squaw-man named Balester live there and have a small sheep-outfit with goats mixed in, Injun style. That's mostly a blind. They have a pulque mill somewhere in the Eagletails, and hand out the stuff to the boys in exchange for gold."

"I see," observed Red. "Dallas and Len Briggs are liable to drop right into something soft, expectin' to find desert solitude." A look of worry crossed his face. "Durn it all, that's too bad, Tom! If I was you, I'd leave 'em alone and 'tend to my knitting."

"Can't do that, cowboy," said Enright cheerfully. "I've got plenty of trouble with Gogetit and Balester on my hands right now, but I want to snake Dallas out of that blasted nest of iniquity. He may be a bad egg, but after all he sent word for help, and I'll give him his chance if he wants it."

Red Kennedy grunted. He said no more on the subject, but his silence was eloquent. He seemed to have considerable doubt regarding the whole matter, and his eyes,

usually so reckless, wore a troubled and anxious look.

Enright, however, seemed to have dismissed his worry. Appearances were deceptive. He dreaded with all his soul what lay ahead—for he could guess about what would happen; but he was going through with it from a sense of duty to the brother he had not seen in years. So the two men headed on for the Soldados, and the first act of the drama that was to be played out in the shadow of those four peaks was on.

TOM ENRIGHT had no intention of surprising his quarry—he knew it could not be done. Spanish Cañon was too well placed, and the shack on the upper flat was secure against any unexpected visitors. When he and Red Kennedy dismounted before the door and knocked, they were told to come in, and found the stage ready set for them.

The shack was an adobe structure of two rooms. A blanket hung over the doorway of the inner room. In the outer, Balester and Johnny Gogetit sat beside the high corner fireplace, and a lamp was burning on the table. Balester was a dirty old man with unkempt hair and beard, a thin hooked nose, and fierce eyes. Johnny Gogetit was much younger; he wore flannel shirt, overalls, high moccasins with white tops, and a red flannel headband held his lank locks in place. He was very dark, heavy-set, powerful, and his eyes glittered at the visitors with a reptilian fixity of gaze.

"Evening," said Balester, without rising. He laughed—a shrill cackle of sneering mirth. "If it aint Mr. Enright! Come in and rest yourself. I expect you come over to see if we'd been selling liquor to your riders, huh?"

"Not tonight," said Enright calmly. "I came to find Dallas Jack Logan."

"Oh, you did!" Balester cackled again. "Aint it funny, Johnny? Every time one of Tom's boys gets drunk, he comes over here to raise hell—as if you and me knew anything about it! That's the way with these here cow-men. They blame a shepherd for everything from grasshoppers to the last *temblor*. And now, durned if he aint looking for some gent here!"

"Where is he?" asked Enright.

"Ask me something easy," returned Balester. "Never heard of him. Who's the feller behind you—oh, a new hand, huh?"

You're right lucky. We been trying to pick us up a couple o' shepherds but aint had much luck, 'less we get them Garcia boys from Santa Cruz—"

"Oh, clap a squaw-hitch on that jaw of yours," broke in Enright. "Where's Dallas?"

"Search me," said Balester. "Might you, by any mere chance, be lookin' for a feller named Enright, now?"

At this, Tom Enright flinched slightly—the secret had been broadcast, then! The Indian watched him stolidly, without expression, yet alertly enough; Red Kennedy remained standing by the door, equally alert. Enright glanced around, then lifted his voice.

"Jack! Oh, Jack! You here, boy?"

THE curtain was pushed aside from the inner door, and two men shoved in. Len Briggs was a thin, furtive little man, with the dangerous look of a wasp in his pinched features and darting eyes; he stood looking around, ill at ease, a cheap city crook far out of his element in this place. He gave Red Kennedy a nod, and waited.

Dallas Logan, as he called himself, was far otherwise. He came forward, hand out, and gripped his brother's palm; he was built much along the same lines as Tom Enright, but his character was stamped indelibly in his face.

"Howdy, Tom!" he exclaimed. "Howdy, Red—good work! I knew you'd locate him. Well, Tom, it was some surprise to find this here cañon inhabited, lemme tell you! I hear you're rich and doing fine, old man."

"Pretty good, Jack." Enright's eyes softened as they rested on his brother. "Come along, and we'll clear out of here. I've got an extra hoss for you."

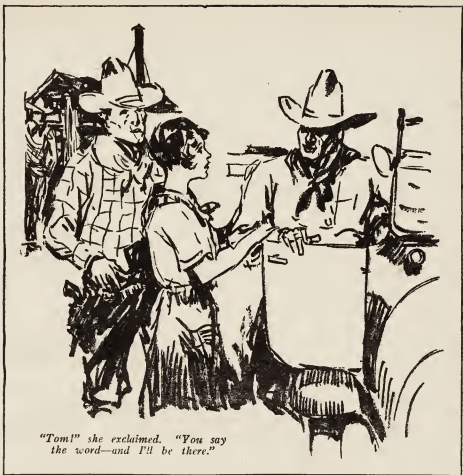
"What's your hurry?" evaded Dallas. "Set down and rest awhile and talk it over."

"Nothing to talk over," said Enright quietly. "You sent a call for help, and I'm here to give it, old chap, so come along."

"What about my pal, here?" asked Dallas, looking rather taken aback. Enright gave the city crook one look that bit deep.

"Sure—I'll get you both out of here and over the State line—up to Denver, if you like."

"But," said Dallas, hesitant, "I aint right



"Tom!" she exclaimed. "You say the word—and I'll be there."

sure we want that, Tom. Now, this place suits us pretty good, see? We can get steady work; we're safe enough—"

"Nothing doing," said Enright. "Up to now, me and these two gents have not been what you might call friends. I owe 'em thanks for taking you in, and I'll pay 'em well for it. But you don't stay here. This is a bootleg joint—"

"You're a durned liar!" shot out Balester. Enright looked at him.

"Balester, you shut up. Keep our argument out of it till I get done—then you can have all you want. Now, Jack, I'm telling you that you don't stay here, *sabe*? You don't throw in with skunks like these, if I know it. You and your pal trot along, and before morning you'll be out of the State."

"No," said Dallas, and then halted.

"What do you want?" snapped Enright.

"Money, for one thing—we're broke. We can get work right here," said Dallas, emboldened, "but I need some money right off. Then, I want an outfit and a couple of hosses."

"You don't get what you want," said Enright. "I'm offering to shelter you and take you to safety, Jack—you can't stay here."

"Why can't we?" snarled out Len Briggs, with a venomous look. "We got protection; we got work; and we're safe to lay over until trouble is gone."

"Because this outfit is a gang of thieves and bootleggers," said Enright quietly. "What you do, feller, is nothing to me. What Dallas does, is a good deal. For all I care, you can stay here and go to the devil your own way; but he's my brother. Jack, come down to earth! I'll give you a fresh start in life, set you goin' right—"

Dallas cut in with a scowl and a sneer. "Yeah, you're like all the rest—give me the sort o' helping hand that suits you! Hell of a brother, you are! Rich, owning a big ranch, and wont give me an outfit and—"

"Not much." With an effort, Tom Enright kept himself in hand, but his face was white. "What I have, I worked for—"

I didn't steal. You don't come in here and start running with this gang, and ask help from me! Not if I know it. You choose between me and them, boy. Stick to them, and take the consequences. Stick to me, and you'll have all I can give you."

"By gosh, they took me in without asking questions, and I'm with 'em!" flamed out Dallas hotly. "If you want to throw me down, all right, you durned sneak!"

"Right. That's settled then," said Enright. He turned to Kennedy. "Red, want to stick with your friends?"

"Not by a damned sight," said Red. "They aint friends of mine—they're low-down skunks, if you want it straight. I'm with you, win, lose or draw!"

"Right." Now Enright, ignoring the others, swung on Balester and Johnny Gogetit. The Indian stirred slightly, as though knowing what was coming and preparing for it. Balester only clawed his whiskers and waited.

"Three weeks ago," said Enright, "I served notice on you two hounds that by the first of the month you'd get out or be put out. Clear out of this range. Since I'm here to ask—what about it? Going to move?"

"You go to hell," said the Indian stolidly—the only words he had uttered. Balester leaned forward and swung his fist, passion in his evil old face.

"Who you think you are—Lawd a'mighty?" he cackled. "Blast your eyes, I don't take no orders from you! This here is our range—"

"You lie." The words came from Enright like a whipcrack. "You own no part or parcel in it, you old buzzard! You haven't even bothered to take up the land—you're a pair of nesters, and nothing more."

"I s'pose you own it, do you?" sneered Balester.

"Yes."

THE word came with a shock to both sheepmen. It was highly significant that neither of them doubted the statement; the one flat, decided word from Tom Enright was a bombshell. Johnny Gogetit came to his feet, staring with his snakelike gaze. Balester's jaw dropped, and the hawk-faced old ruffian caught his breath.

"Huh?" he said. "Huh?"

"Yes," repeated Enright, and smiled grimly at the effect of his words. "I've bought grazing and all except mineral

rights from the State, and I've got an ejection-order against you which will be served tomorrow by a deputy sheriff. What's more to the point, I'm telling you here and now to get off by the first of the month, *sabe*? And to get clear out of this here country. You got one week to clear and stay cleared, and no more notices. And if either one of you or your men go near that pulque-mill of yours back in the hills, before then, you'll get some hot lead where it'll do the most good. Remember it—that's important. Red, let's go."

He turned to the door. Balester leaped to his feet with a vitriolic outburst of profanity, threats, abuse. The Indian made a slighter, more deadly motion, but Red Kennedy's gun leaped out and covered him.

"Look out, redskin," drawled Kennedy. "That's a good feller—keep 'em down."

"Coming, Jack?" said Enright, over his shoulder. "Last chance."

"To hell with you!" snarled Dallas viciously.

Tom Enright shrugged and passed out into the night, but there was an unaccustomed droop to his shoulders, and he was very silent as he rode toward home with Red Kennedy at his stirrup.

CHAPTER III

"TOMORROW'S the first of the month—Saturday, aint it?" asked Red Kennedy.

Enright nodded. It was noon, and the two men were coming from the corral to the new house now going up by the group of oaks above the creek.

The Bar-E-Bar was a pretty place, or would be when the house was built. Just now a gang of Mexican workmen were busily engaged making adobes, spreading them out to dry in the sun, or working on the half-finished building. A shack behind served Enright as temporary living quarters and garage.

"I'm driving over to Piatt's after dinner," said Enright. "Want to come?"

"Sure," said Red promptly. "What you want with them two broncs you laid up in the corral? And the boys said they had three others to bring in from the north range tonight."

Enright gave him a look and a smile. "We got some night riding, most likely. Can't take the car to go into the Eagle-tails."

hands confusedly. And small wonder, for Mary Piatt was enough to confuse anyone in her slender trimness, her black hair and brows over vivid blue eyes and red cheeks, her air of quiet capability and poise.

"Matter enough," she replied. "Father lost his temper with Pete Byers, that horse-wrangler of ours, and they had a fight, and Pete shot him through the leg. Mother telephoned to town and got the doctor and the Sheriff—he's not hurt much, as you can see. Pete has skipped out. The Sheriff's trying to persuade Dad it isn't worth jailing Pete for, but he seems determined about it."

"You, Tom!" came a sharply edged voice from a man on crutches who was leaning against the bars of the corral. "You come here. I got something to say to you."

"Uh-huh," returned Enright, laughing. "I hear you been in a gun-fight, too. Howdy, Doc! Howdy, Sheriff! Gents, this is my prize top hand—Red Kennedy. Just came down from Laramie the first of the week, and I'm figuring on breaking him in as range boss, come round-up. Meet the Sheriff, Red—and Doc Fanton. Hello, Mrs. Piatt! I didn't see you there in the corner. And Jake himself, the gun-fighter!"

One glimpse at Jake Piatt was enough for Red. He beheld a sharp-faced, sharp-eyed man, with a hard jaw, plenty of character, and an obviously positive and fiery disposition. He turned thankfully to the Sheriff, and shook hands. Sheriff Gonzales looked him over thoughtfully.

"Glad to meet you—Laramie, huh? Know the old Box-Cross outfit up there?"

"Nope," said Red. Tom Enright cut in laughingly:

"He's been workin' for the Tumbling-J; met up with that rider I had last year who went north, and wrote me for a job. So here he is, and I reckon he'll stay awhile. Well, Jake, how you feelin'?"

"Well's a man can with a hole in his leg," said Jake Piatt. "How you feelin' yourself?"

THE words held an undertone that drew Enright's face to alert attention.

"All right. Why?"

"Meet up with Starr?"

"Uh-huh! He stopped me and got sort of insulting, so we went to it. I left him looking up at the sky and trying to get his breath. Reckon he's on his way home by now."



"Look out, red-skin," drawled Kennedy. "Keep 'em down."

"You don't look like you'd been fighting," commented Sheriff Gonzales amusedly.

"He aint," said Red whimsically. "It wasn't a fight at all—Tom, he never even laid himself out. My gosh! I'd hate to stand up against him in a real scrap, you bet!"

"Starr hurt?" asked the Sheriff.

"In his dignity, I reckon." Red chuckled.

"So he was insulting, was he?" said Jake Piatt. "Well, Tom, I reckon I'll be just as durned insulting! You get your arm off'm Mary's waist—by golly, you got your nerve coming around here a-tall, much less makin' love to my girl!"

Enright drew himself up. "What's the matter, Jake? You gone crazy?"

"Huh!" grunted Piatt, amid a deep and significant silence. "Mean to say you don't know what you've done?"

"Out with it," said Enright. "It's all news to me. What?"

"Aint you took up a big passel o' cactus and loco-weed range over in the Eagle-tails?"

Enright frowned, puzzled. "Sure—why not?"

"Well, that's enough for me!" declared Piatt. "Durn you, I never thought it of you!"

"And I don't even now," broke out the girl impulsively, facing her father. "Dad, I tell you to go slow. There's some mistake here—"

hands confusedly. And small wonder, for Mary Piatt was enough to confuse anyone in her slender trimness, her black hair and brows over vivid blue eyes and red cheeks, her air of quiet capability and poise.

"Matter enough," she replied. "Father lost his temper with Pete Byers, that horse-wrangler of ours, and they had a fight, and Pete shot him through the leg. Mother telephoned to town and got the doctor and the Sheriff—he's not hurt much, as you can see. Pete has skipped out. The Sheriff's trying to persuade Dad it isn't worth jailing Pete for, but he seems determined about it."

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"Mistake, hell!" roared out Piatt, red-denying with anger. "Didn't that feller Balester tell it all around town himself, how Enright was gone in partners with him? Don't we all know that low-down outfit aint fit to wipe an honest man's boots with? And to think o' Tom Enright takin' up that land and throwing in with a gang like them! Sheep? Hell! They peddle greaser firewater all over the State, and Enright knows it."

Enright went pale. "It's a lie that I have anything to do with that outfit," he said, a danger-ring to his voice, his eyes blazing. "A lie—you understand?"

"A lie, is it?" roared back Piatt. "Then how d'you aim to explain Balester tellin' it all around town? How d'you explain havin' took up that there land—worthless stuff no man would want honest—and admittin' it, huh? How d'you explain—"

Enright's voice cut in, vibrant with anger:

"Jake, sooner than explain anything to you, after what you've said—I'd be hung! You apologize to me before I'll speak to you or have anything to do with you, you fool!"

"Fool, am I?" shot back Piatt, and he shook his fist. "That's all right—you git off'm this place and stay off! My da'ter don't marry no partner of Injuns and boot-leggers and sheepmen, not much! Git out, you and your red-haired rider—git!"

Enright turned and left, abruptly, with Red Kennedy clacking after him, and was

at his car when Mary Piatt came up and caught his arm—quite disregarding a bel-low of rage from the corral. Tom Enright swung around.

"Tom!" she exclaimed. "You say the word—any time—and I'll be there. I trust you."

His arm caught her close for an instant. "Thanks, Mary," he said. "I don't know what it means, but I'll find out. I'll send you word—when it's cleared up."

He turned and got into the car. Red followed. A moment later the car was sweeping out toward the rolling hills and brush of the lower valley. Enright spoke bitterly:

"Can you beat it, Red? They've used my brother's name—the damned crafty coyotes! I'm going over there tonight and clean 'em out. I meant to go for the pulque-mill—my cook knows where it's located; but now, by gosh, we'll make a sweep of that cañon!"

FOR a few moments they tore on at high speed. "Aw, hell!" said Red Kennedy. "It's tough, Tom!" He twisted around. "There's a car coming along after us—"

Enright turned and glanced back. "Sheriff's car. Well, blast it, I'll explain to none of them! But I don't know what to do. I can't put a bullet into Jack, after—"

The windshield in front of them suddenly shivered into flying shreds of glass. Enright cried out sharply, then slumped in his seat; the car swerved, lurched

toward the roadside. Red Kennedy caught the wheel and wrenched it around, just as the thin, far crack of a rifle reached his ears.

CHAPTER IV

SHERIFF GONZALES leaped out as his flivver halted beside the larger car.

"What happened?"

"Rifle-shot from somewhere," said Red. "Gimme a hand with him. Plumb center, I reckon."

Gonzales was an efficient man. They opened Enright's shirt and found the hole to be on the left side, straight through the body.

"Box o' bandages in my right-side car pocket," said the Sheriff. "Get 'em. He aint dead, and it's below the heart, anyhow. Bullet's in the back of the seat-padding now, I guess—"

Kennedy was already on his way. He tore back with the first-aid kit, and they bandaged the senseless man as best they could.

"Better drive him back to Piatt's," said Gonzales. Kennedy looked up and swore.

"That jasper's—after what passed? Not by a damned sight! I'll take him on home, and you send over the doctor!"

"Hm!" Gonzales, standing beside the car, began to roll a cigarette. He looked Kennedy in the eye for a minute. "Hm! What's back of all this yarn Balester told? Do you know?"

"It's Tom—" Red Kennedy checked himself and shook his head. "Aint my business to tell, Sheriff. But we were heading over to clean out Spanish Cañon tonight, I can say that much."

"Uh-huh! I know how Tom felt about that outfit," said the Sheriff. "Piatt's an old fool, of course. Hm! So you come from Laramie, did you?"

Red Kennedy met those dark, probing, efficient eyes and knew the Sheriff had not been bluffed for a minute. His freckled features became grave.

"Why," he said, "didn't Tom say so?"

Gonzales smiled lazily. "Yeah—and he said a few more things about you, too. You know, Red, some of us folks think quite a lot of Tom Enright! Never mind about Piatt—he don't count. So you're going to boss his range for him, huh?"

"I figure on doing it, if he says to," said Kennedy, looking the Sheriff in the eye.

"Uh-huh! All right. Now, where'd

this—here bullet come from? Well, never mind—whoever done it is a long ways off by now. Main thing is to get a doctor. S'pose I run back to Piatt's, while you wait here, and get Doc Fanton. I'll have him here in no time. Then he can go on with you and hold up Tom while you drive. So long."

With a nod, the Sheriff went to his car, climbed in, turned it, and shot off toward the Running-M. Red Kennedy stared after him.

"Durn it all!" he muttered. "There's a white man, by gosh—and all on account of Tom Enright! Well—"

He turned to Enright's car—the wounded man had been placed in the rear seat. One quick glance around, and Kennedy climbed in, got under the wheel, and squinted at the fractured windshield. He slid down in the seat, until his eye was about on a level with the bullet-hole in the leather upholstery behind him, and got a rough line. Then he squared up and gazed at a patch of brush on a hillside three hundred yards off the road.

"Hm—long shot, but he prob'ly had a rest. We'll see."

He set off, heading for the brush. His wounded arm, no longer in a sling but bandaged under his sleeve, was a mere matter of torn flesh and in no way impeded his activity. It was, indeed, well on its way to healing.

His search of the hill-flank was brief, but eminently satisfactory. When he descried the flivver returning, he scrambled back to the road, and met the Sheriff and Doctor Fanton as they climbed out. His occupation had been noted.

"Find anything?" asked Gonzales. Kennedy nodded.

"Tracks. A gent don't lay on his belly and sight for a long shot, without leaving some. You might see things I missed, but I seen enough. Who wears metal toe-caps on his boots?"

"Huh? Nobody that I know of."

"Then we'll keep our eyes open and see. All right, Doc—climb in and we'll go. See you later, Sheriff; I'll be at the Bar-E-Bar all summer, I reckon, and then some."

A NOD from Gonzales, and Red Kennedy got under way for home.

"Piatt's girl know about this shooting?" he demanded of the Doctor, who supported Enright.

"No. Gonzales said nothing about it."

"Then keep it quiet," said Red.

He was trying to recollect if Starr had worn boots with metal tips, but found the effort fruitless. There had been no horse-sign on the hillside, but that meant little; a horse might have been hobbled among some near-by brush. Red had no idea that Starr was the assassin, for the A-W man was not the sort to put through such a piece of work. The search lay farther afield.

"I can tell you right now," said the Doctor, "this man will need nursing."

"Shucks! You can't kill a puncher, without you do it at the start," said Kennedy. "Well, when you go back to Piatt's, you might tell 'em about it. If that girl wants to come over, she can, but I aint asking her to."

"Got anybody on the place to nurse him?"

"Plenty of greasers, and the cook. Me and the boys will be right busy."

The Doctor grunted to himself.

WHEN they reached the home ranch, there was instant commotion—workmen and those of the outfit on the spot came crowding around, and Tom Enright was carried into the makeshift shack. Dr. Fanton examined the injury and put on a proper bandage.

"He's all right, barring infection," he announced. "I'm going to send that girl over, if she'll come—Mary's a good nurse. Get this shack cleaned up and string some blankets around one corner to make a room for her, with a cot in it. Who's running things here?"

"I aim to," said Red, glancing around. "Tom was his own range boss, and had delegated me to the job."

"So I heard him say," and the Doctor nodded. "I'll send out a Mexican woman from town, to keep Mary company and give her a hand. Make a place for her. I'll be out myself tomorrow. Knock off work for the day, around here, and let him sleep. That's all."

Red delegated one of the riders to drive the Doctor back to the Running-M and bring Mary Piatt over. Meantime, the rest of the outfit had come in, with the horses they had been sent to bring from the north range. Red set everyone to work making the shack ready against the girl's arrival, and then called the boys together.

"I'm the newest hand here, fellers," he announced, "and maybe you wont like it

much that I'm takin' charge. Any objectors?"

"Aw, take a whirl at it and see," said somebody. "Loosen up, Red! Who done it?"

"I aint right certain, but I aim to make certain," said Red. "Any of you boys know a gent who wears metal tips to his boots?"

The answer was negative. He went on to describe the encounter with Starr, and told of Enright's shooting.

"Now," he concluded, "it looks to me like the answer lay over in Spanish Cañon. I know Tom figured on cleaning out Bal-ester's pulque-mill tonight—he said you knew where it lay, cookie. I aim to clean out the whole works. Where's the mill, first?"

THE cook described its location. He was an old crippled rider, unable to straddle a horse, but several of the half-dozen punchers knew the lay of the land and undertook to find the place from his description.

"All right," said Red. "Chuck, you and Hodge ride with me—we got one rifle each. The rest of you boys make for that pulque-mill. Shoot anybody there, and burn the works. Shoot all the sheep you come across, and if any of them native shepherds get gay, shoot them likewise."

Somebody whistled at this. "My gosh, you're welcome to be the boss, if you stand by them orders! Who takes the blame?"

"I do," said Red flatly.

"What you and Chuck and Hodge going to do?"

"We aint telling," Kennedy grinned. "But you go to killin' woollies, and do your killing early, *sabe?*"

"Feller," said one soberly, "you know you're givin' orders for a range war?"

Kennedy snarled, and his transformation was startling. The merry, careless good-humor of his freckled face gave place to a vicious deadliness that drew stares from the men around.

"You damn' fool," he said, jerking a thumb toward the shack, "who started it? You think they're going to pull a play like that, and not catch hell? Not if I know it! If you don't want to mix in no range war, draw your time and get out—*pronto!* Make up your minds, now—there's the car coming back. Reckon the girl's in her. And keep your mouths shut to the girl, too."

The decision was unanimous, and Red Kennedy was accepted as boss.

The car returned, and Mary Piatt jumped out, with a handbag. She had received full instructions from Dr. Fanton, and took over her case without delay. Tom Enright was feverish and muttering, and she had buckets of water laid ready, giving the patient medicine that quieted him. Then she came out and beckoned to Red.

"Who fired that bullet? You know?" she demanded, searching him.

"No'm," he returned.

"Well, you can make a good guess. Who?"

"One of the Spanish Cañon gang, I reckon. Tom was going over there tonight to clean 'em out."

"What!" The blue eyes widened under their black brows, and searched him keenly. "What's behind this accusation my father threw at him? Why did he take up that land in the Eagletails?"

"You ask him, miss," returned Red Kennedy, and chuckled. "I aint out to explain anybody else, specially Tom Enright—he can do his own when he's ready. Besides which, about half of all the trouble in this here world is made by tongues wagging. I don't aim for mine to wag."

"Hm! You're exasperating—but I think you're right." And with this, she went back inside the shack and to her duties.

AS the afternoon hours passed, the atmosphere became tense. Kennedy wanted the girl to learn nothing of his project; preparations were made quietly, without ostentation. One of the Mexican workmen volunteered to take part, and was accepted. This made five men to kill sheep and destroy the pulque-mill, three to attack Spanish Cañon; but Red Kennedy knew what he was doing there.

Just before the triangle whanged out its supper message, Mary Piatt came out and called. Enright was awake, was asking for Kennedy. The latter came, with the whole outfit trailing behind, and they all crowded into the shack, staring at the man on the bed. Enright laughed a little.

"All right, boys! Red—"

"Save your breath, Tom." Kennedy stood looking down, and between them passed a tacit but perfectly comprehending message. "I've taken charge of everything—everything, *sabe*? If that suits you, just say so, and leave the rest to me."

"Suits me, Red," said Enright faintly. "Up to you—you know all about it. Tell Mary, if you like—"

"Nope, not me," said Kennedy, and grinned. "That's up to you, old hoss."

"Uh-huh. And Red, keep your eye out for him!"

Kennedy's face changed. "I'll do my best, Tom—can't promise."

He went outside and cursed softly but in a heartfelt manner. "Look out for that dirty pup!" he muttered. "Like's not he was the one used the rifle! Well, we'll see."

Thus, in the space of a few days' time, had the vagrant outlaw and bad man become the leader of righteousness and the guardian of the family hearth and honor. And he did not like his job a little bit.

"Look out for him!" he said bitterly. "I'll sure keep my eye peeled for that *hombre*!"

IF Mary Piatt had any suspicions regarding the abrupt departure of the entire Bar-E-Bar outfit except the cook, she was given no chance whatever to voice them.

Supper was no sooner over, than they disappeared suddenly, Red and Chuck and Hodge alone remaining. Hodge suggested a poker-game, and the other two assented. When they got to the corral the others were already mounting and on their way. The three had their outfits ready; to rope the horses and saddle and get off, was a speedy operation. Red Kennedy had picked his two companions well. Chuck was a wiry old-timer, silent and tobacco-chewing; Hodge was dark, efficient, eager.

"Well, we done got clear without no questions asked," said Hodge. "Red, since you ask me so particular, you aint up against no cinch—just the three of us."

"How come?" asked Red. It was old Chuck who made curt response.

"Balester—he's got sixteen rattles and a button. He's got an Injun, too."

"Johnny Gogetit, huh?"

"Know him, do you?" asked Hodge in surprise.

"Done rode over there with Tom, first day I come. You boys were out on the range. He's got two more in his outfit you don't know about."

"Greasers?"

"No—bank-robbers," said Red, enjoying the sensation his words created. "One's no-account, a city feller, but mean with a gun. T'other's pretty good medicine in a scrap, bein' range-bred."

"By gosh," said Hodge, "if you knowed all this, why not take the Sheriff along?"

"Aint his play," said Red Kennedy. "It's Tom's and mine. Believe me, the prosecuting attorney aint going to ask no questions about shooting up that there outfit!"

"Aint done it yet," said Chuck. "Balester's sharp. That Injun is plumb hell."

"So'm I, when I got to be," said Red Kennedy, and let it go at that.

THEY rode on in the gathering dusk in silence. Red knew well enough that he was up against a hard proposition—probably the Bar-E-Bar was being watched by Balester's men, and especially after the shooting of Enright. However, he had figured things out fairly well to his own satisfaction, and had reasons of his own for not wanting the Sheriff along.

"I dope it like this," he observed, as they jogged onward under the deepening stars. "If anybody was watching the ranch, they'd see the main bunch of our outfit headin' for the pulque-mill, *sabe*? By the time they were certain our boys were bound that-a-way, and got the word to Balester, we'd be clear forgot; besides, mighty little attention would be paid to the three of us, even if we're seen."

"I get you," commented Chuck sagely. "You figure Balester will go chasing off after the boys and leave us a clear advance, huh? But how you figure to wipe out their shack? It's adobes from roof to ground, and you can't burn her!"

"Leave that to me," said Red, and chuckled softly as he slapped the blanket-roll behind his saddle. "And we aint going to find 'em all gone, neither."

He knew very well that if there was one thing Len Briggs was certain not to do, it was to go prowling about rattlesnake-infested hills at night.

The slow hill-miles drew behind. There was no moon, and the starlight made poor going of the rough trail; later the moon would come up, and Red wanted to reach his destination before moonrise. In this endeavor he was successful.

Spanish Cañon was a long and tortuous cañon ending in a blank wall of rock on all three sides. Balester's shack was built at the upper end, close to this wall, where existed a tiny spring sufficient for the needs of a few men. That some back entrance existed, was certain, but in talking over the situation with Tom Enright, Red

had learned only that such a way was not generally known—the only access to the shack being from in front, up the cañon.

As the three rode along and neared their goal, faint crepitations drifted to them across the night—somewhere in the hills was shooting.

"That's the cañon ahead," said Chuck.

"Better leave the hosses 'bout halfway up, by the turn, I reckon?"

"Uh-huh—if we don't draw a shot first," said Kennedy. "Tom allowed the place usually had a guard out, but I'm hopin' he'll be drawed off. Better spread out a mite."

FOR safety's sake they separated and rounded the knob ahead that marked the cañon opening. Nothing happened; the sandy cañon stretched off to their right and lost itself in darkness as it narrowed and the walls deepened. Another muttering of shots, barely felt rather than heard, came to them.

None of the three spoke; they rode tense, waiting, fully conscious that at any instant a rifle might belch redly at them from the blackness. All was silent up the cañon. They came at last to the turn, and dismounted. The horses were hobbled, rifles drawn from boots, and Red Kennedy unstrapped his blanket-roll and laid it by a clump of rocks to one side.

"If I send one of you boys back for this," he said, "you handle it real gentle. Inside there's five sticks of dynamite I found around the place."

Chuck grunted; Hodge laughed softly. They moved forward on foot, leaving the horses, and next moment were around the turn of the cañon.

Ahead of them, in the shack, glimmered a light. Chuck muttered softly:

"I hear they got a corral somewheres in the hills close by, in back—and a trail up the cliff. They can slip out on us, easy."

"Spread out and use your judgment about shootin', boys," said Red. "I'll palaver."

He went forward alone, making no effort to conceal his approach. From high over the hills came thin sounds—the sharp echoing crack of rifles it sounded like, this time.

So far as Red could tell, the shack ahead of him was deserted, despite its glimmering light. Perhaps Balester and the others had

been called away by sudden warning of the raid; yet he himself could not picture Len Briggs in the hills at night. The city crook was far out of his own habitat here.

He paused abruptly. A sixth sense warned him of peril; yet he could not place it. With a resolve to call out, he took another step forward—and it happened.

Kennedy felt his knee touch something—a thin wire, taut and invisible in the darkness, stretched across the rocky trail. In the very instant he touched it, he knew what it meant; every faculty on the alert, he reacted with the frantic speed of a wild animal. He flung himself sidewise, flung himself desperately, headlong, with a quick jump of muscles. Ten feet to the right, from a clump of rocks, roared a rifle. Kennedy fell and lay motionless, his cocked rifle exploding as he went down.

Even as the gun cracked from the rocks, Hodge and Chuck opened on it—ignorant of the trap, thinking it a man lying there. From the flat roof of the adobe shack spat the hot tongue of another rifle, answering their shots, firing rapidly. Then silence fell, and on the silence rose the voice of Hodge in sharp and frightful surprise.

"He got me—Chuck, he got me—"

The cry died out suddenly, choked by an invisible hand. Grim old Chuck, however, made no reply but sat gripping his rifle in the darkness, fighting down the groan of agony that came to his lips; for one of those shots had smashed his leg. Veteran as he was, he knew they were up against a marksman, and he knew who that marksman must be.

"By gosh, if I can only plug him!" he thought desperately.

UNDER the high stars he could make out the body of Red Kennedy sprawled across the trail, but that of Hodge was invisible. He had no need to look at Hodge, however, for death had spoken in that one choked cry.

By this time Chuck knew Kennedy had stumbled upon a trap, and could figure out just what had happened. Probably the Indian had waited here, while Balester and the others had answered the alarm from the hills behind. Well, regrets were useless—the trap had been sprung, and had caught its victims!

The glimmering lamp in the shack went out.

For a while nothing happened. Chuck

tied his neckerchief about his leg-wound and then held his position, rifle cocked and ready, eyes fixed just to the right of the shack, that he might better catch any motion or shadow at the entrance. Sooner or later Johnny Gogetit must come out to inspect his catch, figuring all three visitors *hors de combat*. The extinguishing of the light was proof of this intention.

Minutes dragged away, and the pain of the broken leg became throbbing and intolerable, but the old puncher waited silent and motionless. He suspected some further trick, but knew not what to seek—he had forgotten Red Kennedy's remarks about Len Briggs, and all his faculties were concentrated upon getting the Indian.

A BLOT, dark against the shack—the door had opened; something showed like a dim shadow against the shadows. Old Chuck thrilled to the half-seen motion, riveted his attention on the body of Red Kennedy, which was fairly clear in the starlight, and settled down a trifle. Again the dim sense of motion, and then a figure stealing forward openly, advancing to the body of Kennedy, bending over it.

Chuck lifted his rifle, sighted carefully, and then waited again until the figure came erect. He pressed the trigger, and to the reverberating echo of the shot, the man above Kennedy pitched backward. But the Bar-E-Bar rider did not enjoy his victory—from the flat roof of the shack spurted a jet of flame, and the crack of a second rifle mingled with the report of the first.

To the Indian, waiting at the little parapet of the roof-edge, the response came clearly and beyond mistake, in the rattle of the rifle falling from the hands of Chuck, and the low groan that was abruptly cut off.

Johnny Gogetit ejected the empty shell, laid down his rifle and rose. He descended the ladder from the roof to the room below, and lighted the lamp on the table there. From the back room he fetched a large electric torch, and with this in hand, went to the door and stepped outside. He appeared unhurried, quite confident, as though he had relied entirely on his senses to tell him what was outside, and knew they would not deceive him. . . .

Nor had he been deceived. The probing finger of light fell upon the figure of Kennedy, limply slumped. Half across him

lay the man whom Chuck had shot—and the old rider had not missed that shot. Len Briggs, craftily sent forth by the guileful redskin, had gone to his final reward.

Hodge was picked up by the beam of light, shot through the body, dead. The Indian turned and flung the ray ahead of him, until it touched Chuck. He grunted

"If you're askin' me," said a voice, "you were a damn' fool, Johnny, to pull off these here killings! We can't get away with it."

"Huh!" It was the deep guttural accent of the redskin that answered. "They come to steal. You bet!"

A laugh—and the laugh thrilled the

Balester leaned forward, peering. Kennedy struck.



approval of his last shot, as he saw its result—straight through the heart. A grim smile played about his thin lips, and then he extinguished his flashlight and went back to the shack.

Possession, after all, is not only nine points of the law, but is also trump ace in the game—when played aright.

CHAPTER VI

RED KENNEDY was not dead—he had, by his swiftly desperate motion, evaded the bullet from the trap-gun, but that motion hurled him headlong against a rock, full weight. He lay stunned, otherwise unhurt.

When he opened his eyes, a shock of horror ran through every fiber of him. A few feet away was a white thing staring at him—the face of Len Briggs, his whilom partner in crime. The dead eyes were glaring at him with glassy reflections. Then he realized abruptly that the moon was high, striking full down upon Len Briggs.

prostrate Red Kennedy—Dallas Jack's voice!

"Why not? It's an easy trick to turn, Balester! This Kennedy is known as a crook—if not by name, at least he can be identified quick enough! He's wanted where we are. Len and I can go off among the hills to that place you spoke of, and hide out; you get the Sheriff here and turn over Kennedy as a crook. Why the other men were with him, killing our sheep and attacking our place, is up to them to explain. If the Bar-E-Bar was sheltering wanted bandits, the law is on our side, sure's shooting! Two of them, and Kennedy—shucks, it's plain's daylight!"

"Somethin' to that, kid," said Balester in return. "Now, what happened out yonder?"

"The mill was burned. Don't know if we got anyone or not—Miguel was hit in the leg and I got him on his hoss," said Dallas. "How about you?"

"Sheep-killing, that's all," said Balester, with disgust. "Hell! I done missed both ends of the show. Well, this means that we got Enright sure, and they framed up the raid in revenge. Come on in and

let's rustle some supper and figure things out—"

Kennedy heard the voices die away. He lay quiet, being able to see nothing except that staring face by virtue of his position; he was very stiff and bruised, but dared not shift himself.

His brain was at work, assorting the information that had thus been vouchsafed him. So Chuck and Hodge had been shot, somehow caught in the trap! Dallas Jack had been at the pulque-mill with a greaser sheep-herder, and the latter had been wounded. Balester had been somewhere in the hills, probably on his way to the mill.

"Looks like my little plan went flooy," thought Red. "They didn't damage the boys—but they must have wiped out my party, right enough! Where'm I hurt?"

EXCEPT for a sore head, he found himself uninjured. Cautiously turning his head, he saw a light in the shack window—and decided to move instantan out of the moonlight. His absence would certainly be noted the instant Johnny Gogetit took a look at the scene, but the first thing was to move.

Accordingly Mr. Kennedy arose and took himself into the first patch of shadow. Since nothing happened, he paused there to reconnoiter—and found himself within three feet of Hodge's body. He moved again, rather shaken. No rifles were in sight; they must have been collected by the redskin.

It was not hard to conjecture that Hodge or Chuck had shot Len Briggs. Since Dallas Jack had spoken of Len as alive, it was evident that Dallas and Balester had only just arrived when Red woke up, and had not observed the body. Kennedy felt in his pockets, rolled a smoke, then made his way down the cañon to the bend, as quietly as possible. The quicker he got to his saddle and away, the better.

Upon reaching the elbow, however, he saw that there were no horses here. Moonlight filled the cañon floor, and he examined the sand in consternation. The sign was plain to read; the hobbles lay there, taken off and flung aside, and the three horses had been set going down the cañon for home. Kennedy scratched a match and lighted his cigarette and sat on a boulder.

"My gosh!" he observed in blank dismay. "Where do we go from here?"

He was staggered, bowled over completely; it took a little time to gather himself together and face realities.

Yet already his quick brain was leaping ahead. He could see how this outfit could get away with murder, easily enough; Dallas had elucidated the plan, and it could be carried a step farther without difficulty. The body of Len Briggs would serve Balester admirably; with Briggs presumably joined to the Bar-E-Bar, and Kennedy with them also, and no one alive to tell the truth about it all—why not unprovoked attack?

"It wouldn't even go to a jury," thought Kennedy in dismay. "It'd look like cattle against sheep, or anything else that'd serve their turn. There's only one thing to save the situation—that's for me to stay alive and get away. Even then—"

Even then, if these crafty scoundrels appealed to the law, what would happen? He would be identified with Briggs as one of the bandit gang. He would have no proof whatever that any of the Spanish Cañon outfit had shot down Tom Enright. He had taken on his own shoulders all the responsibility of this raid—and he would bear it.

The whole affair simmered down to one fact: either he must play out the game single-handed, and win it, or else he must take the consequences and go under. This realization bucked him up amazingly. To get away, now that the horses were gone, was out of the question. His absence discovered, they could track him down in no time.

"When the outfit gets home, and our hosses get home," he reflected, "then they'll come a-smoking to see what's happened to us—that's certain sure! It's sure, but likewise it's durned indefinite. Them boys wont be home until morning anyhow, maybe later. Hm! Now, where have all Balester's greasers gone—shepherds and liquor-boilers? Dallas said Miguel was hit in the leg and he got the greaser on a hoss—for where? No greasers around here. And Dallas and Balester come on foot."

HIS cigarette had gone out long since. He was sitting in the shadow of the wall, at the cañon elbow; and he recalled how Dallas and Balester had just joined Johnny Gogetit as he had come to his senses. They had come on foot—from where? From the cañon side, of course!

They had come down to the floor of the cañon after leaving their horses at the presumed corral up above and behind the box cañon. Therefore the end of that trail must be just about where he had lain. And the Mexicans of the outfit no doubt had their own abode near that corral, up above.

Kennedy felt for the blanket-roll he had left, and touched it in the darkness. Then he stiffened and felt for his only weapon—the heavy revolver at his belt. Some one was coming up the cañon, afoot—he could see the moving figure coming across a patch of moonlight! Then the voice reached him, muttering, in soft drawling peon's Mexican.

"*Madre de Diós!* What a night—and there will be more riding tomorrow! It is the life of a dog, not of a man."

Coming—whence? From guard duty, conjectured Kennedy. He softly rose and slipped around the bend of the cañon, and stole forward up the trail. The light glimmered in the shack, and upon the cold night air drifted the aroma of coffee. When he came close to the spot he had so recently quitted, he halted in the shadowed patch that concealed the body of Hodge. There he crouched, crooked his elbow, hid his white face in it.

THE grumbler came slouching along, but had ceased his grumbling now. As he came toward the bodies; he signed himself and turned quickly aside to the right, passing close by Kennedy, quite obviously to climb some path leading up the dark cañon-side. Wide hat was pulled low on his head, *serape* folded about his shoulders.

Behind him, Kennedy rose soundless, a shadow among the shadows. He reached out and jerked off the hat, and with his other hand struck—and struck without pity. The front sight of the revolver swept across the man's skull even as he turned, and he fell without a groan.

Kennedy donned the hat, wound the *serape* about his shoulders, then stooped. He dragged the limp figure quickly over to where Len Briggs lay staring in death, and dropped the Mexican there; then he darted into the shadows and rested immobile. Just in time, too. The door of the shack swung open, and into the lighted square stepped the figure of Johnny Gogetit, staring out a long minute at the trail.

When the redskin vanished, Kennedy stole forward, picking his way carefully until he was close to the shack. There he

waited, listening to the mutter of voices that reached him from within. He gathered that Dallas Jack had just learned that Briggs was dead, but the city crook had no great mourning. As Kennedy had anticipated, the fact was at once seized upon by Dallas, and turned to advantage.

"That there *hombre* aint a bit slack in his mental workings," reflected Kennedy. "Huh! What's he at now?"

The voice of Dallas came more clearly. "Whoever's goin' had better get started, then! You'll want to get the Sheriff and a posse here right off—let 'em see everything for themselves before the coyotes pick them dead sheep clean! Goin' to send a greaser?"

"No." This was Balester speaking. "I'll go myself—it's safer."

"Right you are. Arrange with one of them greasers to take me to that place you spoke of, and I'll get off in an hour. You say you sent them Bar-E-Bar hosses home? Then you want to move lively—get the Sheriff here before that outfit comes to find out about their three men. Better get right off."

"I expect," said Balester. "Suit you, Johnny?"

The Indian grunted assent. Mr. Kennedy made all haste to withdraw to the shadowy depths where the upward trail began. He was feeling far more confident, now, and had definitely resolved upon the enterprise ahead—in fact, he had no choice. He must either manage the affair single-handed, or be very, very sorry.

AS he waited, he scrutinized the side of the cliff above him. Though it was shadowed, he could make out what might be a trail winding to the top. Then he saw the shack door opened, and the tall, lanky figure of old Balester showed up.

"I'll 'tend to it," said Balester over his shoulder. "Get him here about sunup, with luck. So long."

The door closed behind him, and Balester came toward the trail. Despite his years, his step was lithe and springy, and he was whistling gayly as though thoroughly satisfied with himself. Kennedy pulled an end of the *serape* over his face and waited, gun ready in case he was seen.

Balester was unsuspectingly inclined, however. He passed Kennedy, still whistling, and began to mount the trail. Kennedy noted carefully; and when the other was halfway up, he rose and followed.

When Balester was nearly at the top, Kennedy's foot set a stone rolling, and the other whirled at once, with a curt question in Spanish. Kennedy bent his head forward, so that the wide rim of the *sombrero* concealed his face, and stuck a match to his cigarette. He pinched it out at once, and responded in the *peon* drawl of the man he had knocked down.

"I am coming, señor."

"Oh, it's you, Juan!" said Balester. "Everything all right below?"

"Everything, señor."

Balester went on. Kennedy followed, now at a quicker pace. The other had seen his *serape* and wide hat in the shadows, and revealed by the match-light, and in any lighted spaces Kennedy made certain that Balester's back was turned before he crossed. At the top of the trail he let Balester go on, and then came after him, finding up here no shelter whatever except scattered brush and rock.

"Got to do it quick," he thought, and hastened his step.

Balester turned as he came up.

"Rope me a hoss out of the corral, will you?" he said. "I got to—say, you aint Juan after all—"

"No, señor, I am Miguel Espinosa," said Kennedy, and came close. Balester leaned forward, peering at him.

Kennedy struck him a light, glancing blow across the head; then, as he staggered, drove in a heavier, biting stroke. The heavy revolver did its work well. Balester collapsed in a heap and lay quiet.

CHAPTER VII

KENNEDY took no chances with Balester, for if he won his game, the man would be more valuable to him alive than dead. He cut up the *serape* into strips and bound and gagged his prisoner with care, then deposited him among a heap of rocks for future reference. This done, he continued his way, having now his own gun and that of Balester.

"I reckon I know what I got to do, and that's half the battle," he reflected rather comfortably. "With the head start I have now, I'd ought to stand a pretty fair show! First thing is to persuade these greasers to git up and git, and do it quick. Good thing I talk the lingo!"

His objective was clearly in sight—the glow of a light in a gulch just below him.

In the moonlight he could make out the lines of an adobe bunk-house, and at a little distance, what he took to be a corral. To be certain, of a free hand in Spanish Cañon itself it was imperative that he get rid of these men, and also turn all the horses out, that escape might be cut off for his quarry.

Then, as he advanced, thought of Dallas Jack recurred to him, and he cursed softly. For a moment he wavered, but loyalty to Enright held him steady.

"That buzzard would round on me in a minute and give me up," he reflected. "If I let him go, it'll be a botched job sure as shooting! But I reckon I got to do it. Tom's got a sneakin' feeling for the coyote, and I got to play square with Tom, whatever happens."

So, with a sigh, he resigned himself to a change in his very tentative plans.

Five minutes later, a gun in each hand, he quietly stepped into the open doorway of the bunk-house, grimly surveying the scene for a moment before anyone saw him. The heavy air reeked with sheep-effluvia, human sweat, spirits and plain dirt. Four Mexicans sat about, smoking and talking over a bottle of colorless liquor; three others, one with a bandaged leg, lay in their bunks along the wall.

At length one of the men, glancing at the doorway, saw Kennedy and sat staring, his jaw down. The others turned.

"Quietly, caballeros, quietly," said Kennedy in the tongue they knew best. Sight of his two guns held them spellbound. "Do you all want to go to jail and stay there a while? No? Then let me give you some advice. I do not want to take you to jail—we have enough prisoners already, with Señor Balester and his friends. Two of you pick up Miguel, whose leg was wounded near the pulque-mill, and carry him. All of you take your belongings and depart—saddle horses and go. Leave one horse in the corral only, turn the others out. Two of my men are stationed there, so be careful! If you do not obey me, or if you do any shouting, they will fire on you at once. You had better get clear out of the county at once, or I may have to arrest you. All right—bring your guns and knives over here, one by one. Pronto!"

Being emphatically not *caballeros* at all, but unwashed, ignorant, depraved *peons*, the men before him were frightened stiff. His words anent the pulque-mill and

Miguel's wound, his hint regarding Bal-ester, his very appearance here—all went to prove that the night's events had ended in complete disaster for them.

None made the least move to resist. The sleepers were awakened; beside the door was laid a pile of weapons; the men gathered up their few belongings sullenly, and two of them got Miguel out of his bunk and

formation from this human reptile, realizing its impossibility; as regarded Johnny Gogetit, he was in doubt; but he hoped to get hold of Dallas Jack a little later. He wanted to do no more shooting until he learned who had downed Tom Enright—and he knew very well that Dallas would talk. Somewhere in that young man was a decidedly saffron streak, and Red Ken-



Kennedy was carried in.
"By gosh, I got him!" he
mumbled.

hoisted him on a hand-seat between them. Kennedy gestured with one revolver.

"*Bueno!* Now, become *caballeros* in all truth, *amigos*—mount and depart! And remember well that two men with rifles will be watching you there. *Vayan ustedes con Dios!*"

THEY filed out and departed in sullen silence. Kennedy dared not follow to make sure of them, but had little doubt they would obey implicitly. His seeming carelessness had impressed them—only if he followed would they doubt his story of hidden watchers. So, when they were a little way off, he turned and retraced his steps toward the cañon trail. They would leave one horse in the corral—and that horse would give Dallas Jack his get-away.

Kennedy sighed at the thought, then passed on and visited his captive ensconced among the rocks. Balester was still dead to the world, but his head was bleeding nicely and he was in promising shape. Kennedy had no idea of extracting any in-

nedy would not stop at any half-measures in fetching it to the surface. However, he knew he could take no chances with the redskin, for there lay the danger-point.

He descended the trail, picking his way carefully after a close scrutiny of the moonlit floor below. The light still glimmered in the shack; and when he saw again the little blurs in the moonlight that had been Chuck and Hodge, sharp anger rose in him and sent caution flying to the winds. He had thought to lie here in wait until Dallas Jack sought the corral—but now his good resolutions went flying.

They were there in that shack, both of them, alone; to surprise them were no difficult matter; was he afraid to face them openly, then? The question beat at him insistently. To walk in on them, capture them both, get the information he wanted—that was the manly way of it, after all. And better to settle the thing straight from the shoulder!

"Ten to one," thought Kennedy, "the Injun's the one who laid for Tom! He'd

hang for killing Chuck and Hodge—but if I'm sure he's the one, then he don't hang in a hurry. I got to make Dallas talk turkey, then verify it by lookin' at his boots. Tie up the Injun, then make Dallas talk; that's the ticket."

FIRED by impatience, lured on by the initial success which had hovered over his lone-handed campaign, Red Kennedy made his way on down the incline. He had put through a good job so far, and knew it—yet somehow he was afraid of the redskin, afraid of his own luck. This entire dependence on himself nerved him forward; yet it also startled him. Killings, such as had occurred this night, were new to Kennedy.

Since he had it to do, Kennedy went straight at his job. He tucked one gun away inside his waistband, out of sight. Holding the other, hammer back under thumb, he advanced to the shack, knowing that he would be heard but would be taken for Balester returning, or one of the Mexicans. He came to the doorway, and swung the door open before him.

Johnny Gogetit and Dallas Jack were sitting at the table, a reek of coffee in the room, and both glanced carelessly at the doorway. Then they stiffened, utter amazement coming into both pairs of eyes.

"Up!" said Kennedy curtly.

Both obeyed, with stiff gestures, dumb-founded by this apparition. Kennedy grinned at their stark consternation.

"Sort of surprised you gents, I reckon. You, Injun, stand up facing the wall, your back to me. Go ahead and do it—I'd as lief drill you as not! Put your hands down, and keep 'em behind your back. Go on, now."

The snaky glitter of his gaze intensified but without speaking a word, Johnny Gogetit obeyed the order. He rose, stepped to the opposite wall, and stood facing it, hands held out behind his back.

"You're a fine double-crosser!" jerked out Dallas venomously. "What ye mean by—"

"Shut up," said Kennedy. "I'll talk to you in a minute. First, you go tie them two projecting wrists, and do it right. There's a thong laying on the table—use it."

"I will not!" flamed out Dallas.

"No?" Kennedy's narrowed eyes blazed at him. "You yeller pup, d'you want a bullet through your hand? You'll get it

in less'n a minute. And don't try to stall for time, neither. Them greasers are all rounded up, and Balester with 'em. You're goin' to get just one slim chance to save your neck, but you aint goin' to get it if you don't look sharp. I'll drill your fist here and now if you don't jump—"

Dallas Jack did not jump; but reading earnest in the words, he moved to the table and took up the leather bootlace lying there. Having no choice in the matter, he went to Johnny Gogetit and looped the two brown, powerful wrists together, then drew tight the knot.

"Step back to the fireplace, now," ordered Kennedy. "First, take out your gun and lay it on the table—and if you want to set your thumb on the hammer and pull her back, go ahead, feller. I got eyes."

Beyond doubt the temptation was great, but Dallas Jack resisted nobly. He was acquainted with Mr. Kennedy's abilities, and he saw the revolver was all ready, and while he might and probably would drop Kennedy, he most certainly would be dropped himself. Therefore, producing his automatic pistol, he reached forward and laid it submissively on the table.

"You'll get it for all this work yet," he said with suppressed fury. "You've rounded on your pals, and you'll sure as hell get your reward for it, you double-crosser!"

KENNEDY lowered the hammer of his gun, and grinned. He moved around until he could get a glimpse of the Indian's boots, and shook his head disappointedly.

"Well, Dallas, I reckon you got to talk," he observed. "I might say there's one hoss left in the corral, up above, and that hoss is yours because Tom said so, and you'll have a clear go out o' the country. That is, if you tell what I want to know."

"I'll tell you nothing," said Dallas, watching him sullenly.

"You're liable to change your mind about that," returned Kennedy. "Cause why, if you don't, I'm sure as hell going to bust up your right hand with a bullet. Now, you gents made one mistake. Tom aint dead, savvy? But I aim to know who put the bullet in him. I got your greasers, and I got Balester, and when the boys get down here they're liable to string up the both of you gents."

The eyes of Dallas flickered in alarm at all this. Kennedy went on, smoothly.

"Dallas, you cough up which one of

your pals lay on the hillside and drilled your brother! I'm real earnest about knowing, remember, and I aint doing no urging. My next pleasant and kind request will be spoke by my thumb lettin' go this here hammer. Since I got me a little evidence already to back me up, be sort of careful to speak the truth."

Dallas Jack licked his lips and shrank a little, furtively. His eyes darted about, as though in search of help. They fastened on the doorway, over the shoulder of Kennedy, and widened. Kennedy laughed.

"No, you don't, feller! That's an old trick. Speak up!"

"He did it himself," said the Indian, facing the wall. Dallas Jack started.

"That's a lie!" he cried out wildly. "It's a lie!"

"All right; I know it is," said Kennedy. "You aint got the right boots, nor the right nerve neither, Dallas. Come on, now—who done it? The Injun?"

Johnny Gogetit cocked his head, as though listening, then spoke again, in Mexican.

"Move fast, you fool, move fast."

"Who, me?" drawled Kennedy.

He swerved suddenly, felt a breath on his neck, sensed danger—too late. A figure struck him full from behind, toppled him over, knocked the revolver from his hand with one quick arm sweep. He went down, and Dallas Jack came hurtling down upon the pair with a yell of delight.

The Mexican guard, whom Kennedy had stunned and left in his own stead, possessed more nerve than his fellows—nerve enough, indeed, completely to turn the tables on this interloper!

CHAPTER VIII

THE Mexican, fortunately for Kennedy, was weaponless, and had little science in fighting; with a wild sweep that knocked the revolver away, he hurled himself upon the rider. Sent forward headlong, Kennedy went flat on his face—and the weapon under his waistband knocked the wind out of him in thorough fashion. Momentarily he was helpless.

In this instant, Dallas Jack came down upon them both. His weight sent the Mexican all asprawl, and he smashed in one blindly furious blow to Kennedy's ribs, then caught hold in a strangle grip—he was insensate with rage, beyond control,

worrying the fallen man as a dog does a downed coyote.

"Cut me free!" screamed the Indian, himself transported with a wild spasm of fury. His deep voice rose shrill with oaths. "You, Baca! To me!"

He was disregarded by Dallas; but the swarthy Mexican, scrambling up, began to fumble at the knots binding Johnny Gogetit. He knelt to the task, took his teeth to the thong. Next instant both of them were knocked aside.

FOR Kennedy, frantic, twisted himself about, heaved sidewise, and grappled with Dallas Jack; locked, the two men plunged, caromed into the others, rolled across the floor with spasmodic, muscular efforts.

Johnny Gogetit was like a madman, his face a snarling mask. He kicked the prostrate Baca, cursed him to his feet, yelled at him to pull knife and cut thong. Baca found the knife at the Indian's hip, and jerked it out; then, with one slash, cut thongs and wrist-skin together, so that a howl of pain broke from the Indian.

Kennedy, meantime, brought up against the side wall with a crash, found himself underneath, and Dallas sprawled over him with a storm of blows, kicks, gouging fingers. Once again Kennedy flung forth desperate effort, gripped the other man; both came to their knees, tugging, straining, the breath coming from them in sobbing bursts.

Then, abruptly, Kennedy found one foot touching the wall, giving brace and purchase. He gave back a little, and with a sudden wild lunge drove forward, gained his feet, sent Dallas Jack headlong backward across the room. Kennedy stood staggering with his own effort. Dallas screamed out, went ramming into Baca; both men smashed into the table and overturned it, the lamp hurtling against the adobe wall beyond and spreading around a pool of smoky blazing oil.

In the instant of darkness Kennedy tore at his waistband. Then the oil was spurted up in flame; and in this burst of light, Kennedy saw the snarling Baca plunge his knife repeatedly into the figure of Dallas Jack, as the two scrambled across the up-turned table. Instinctively Kennedy fired—sent a second bullet into the swarthy figure. He whirled, remembering the Indian, fired a third time; but Johnny Gogetit was there no longer. A shadow was gone through the doorway at one wild bound, and the door slammed shut behind him.

The glare and the smoky fumes of oil filled the shack. Kennedy looked at the dead Baca, saw that Dallas Jack was coughing out his life on one elbow, and then darted to the door. He jerked it open, and a shot smashed into the wood under his hand—the spurt of fire came from the trail. The Indian had caught up a weapon from the table in his flight, and now was headed for escape.

“Had enough, have you?” muttered Kennedy, as he got his breath. “You devil—you’re the one that shot Tom, shoes or no shoes! And if you get to that corral ahead of me—”

He darted forward across the moonlit space, and another shot rang at him from above; but a running man has small chance of hitting another below him. Kennedy did not respond to the fire. He made for the trail, intent upon getting to closer quarters, for it was obvious that panic had gripped Johnny Gogetit and he was making every effort to get away at all costs.

“He’ll wait for me up above, where the trail comes over,” thought Kennedy, as he plowed upward. “I’ll fool him there!”

Nearly at the top now, the line of brush and manzanita clear-cut in the moonlight. Kennedy jumped out of the trail and hurled himself at the brush, forced a way through it, heard the swish of a bullet and the sharp report as the Indian fired at the sound. Then silence. When at length Kennedy came into the open, there was no sign of his quarry. Whether the redskin were hiding, waiting for a sight of him, or had gone on toward the corral, he could not determine. He took a chance on the latter, regained the trail, and ran forward; after a moment he made out the fleet-footed figure ahead, heard Gogetit’s voice lifted in a shout. Calling his sheep-herders—vainly!

Certainty grew upon Kennedy, as he spurted forward; his man could not get the corral open, get out the horse—ah!

FROM the Indian came a thin, shrill whistle that quavered high in a peculiar note. From the corral came response in the whinny of a horse. Kennedy breathed a curse, as he comprehended the situation, and saw a dark shape come from the corral. The gate had been left open by the Mexicans, and the one horse left had been that of the Indian, probably an animal they dared not touch in any event, as it belonged to their master.

Dismay and rage gripped Kennedy; he quickened his pace, spurted again, then saw how futile it was and came to an abrupt halt. He jerked out his revolver and fired, foolishly; his muscles were not calm; the bullet flew wide. Johnny Gogetit, seeing himself now certain of escape, turned and laughed, and emptied his gun at Kennedy—when it was empty, threw the useless weapon toward him with a curse.

Kennedy stood motionless, untouched by the bullets, though they went close enough, waiting steadily. It was plain enough what he must do, and though every instinct revolted against it, he had no choice.

The horse drew closer to the man, who whistled again. Kennedy drew a deep breath; he was sure of himself now, and though it was a long shot, he drew back the hammer, fired. To the shot, the horse plunged, stumbled heavily, crashed to the sand. An insensate scream of fury burst from Johnny Gogetit. He started back toward Kennedy, but that figure in the moonlight daunted him. Abruptly he turned again and took to flight in the brush. Kennedy fired—vainly. The hammer clicked. His five shots were gone.

“Aw, hell!” said Kennedy, and flung away the gun.

CHAPTER IX

THE temporary shack housing the owner of the Bar-E-Bar was witnessing unwonted activity. Several cars stood near, and visitors sat about the bed where Enright lay, with Mary Piatt sitting at his side. Jake Piatt had just arrived. Sheriff Gonzales and a rather heavy-set city man were there, and outside the doorway lounged one or two riders.

It was the second day after the events in Spanish Cañon.

“Well, now you’ve got the whole story,” said Enright, propped up on pillows. “What’s the finding, Gonzales?”

“You-all wait a minute,” broke in Jake Piatt. “Tom, I done you wrong and I’m sorry. Will you shake?”

“You bet!” Smiling, Tom Enright held out his hand, and Piatt gripped it. “I didn’t want to explain before, Jake, but now—”

“Now she’s all-clear,” said Piatt, and looked at the Sheriff. “Well? What you fellers going to do about it all?”

"Nothing to do," said the Sheriff calmly. "The thing looks pretty open, Jake. Balester, he was sheltering them two bandits, and deserved all that was coming to him. Near as we can figure out, from what he tells us, it was Johnny Gogetit who done killed Hodge and Chuck. As for Balester himself, we're holding him."

"What for?" asked Enright.

"For putting that there bullet into you. I looked the ground over careful, and found it was done by a gent who wore toe-plates. Well, when we found Balester tied up, he was wearing boots with toe-plates. I expect Kennedy may know something about it, if he ever shows up."

"I don't see why we've heard nothing from him!" said Enright. "You say it was figured that he had set off afoot after Johnny Gogetit—but he'll never catch that Injun."

The Sheriff cleared his throat, and looked uneasily at the city man.

"Mr. Jenkins, here, wants to see Kennedy," he said.

His tone was significant. Enright looked at the city man, who nodded.

"Uh-huh, that's what I come for, Enright," said Jenkins. "I'm with the Burnsfield agency—we protect banks, you know. Looks like this Kennedy was one of the same gang who blew that Dorado City bank and then come up here—Len Briggs, Dallas Jack and the others. I've got a right close description, and would know him if I saw him."

"You're wrong about him, then," said Enright quickly. "He's from Laramie."

"Uh-huh." Jenkins was stolid, dogged, unsympathetic. "I reckon he can prove up on dates and so forth, in that case. He'll have to do it."

THERE was a moment of silence, ominous enough. Enright's face drew tense. He was about to speak, when Mary Piatt pressed his hand, and he found her eyes warning, anxious. He checked himself and lay breathing heavily. Jenkins lighted a cigar and eased himself in his chair.

One of the riders put his head in the door.

"Car comin'," he said. "Looks like Jim Hawkins, and you can smell the sheep-dip on it this far."

There was general lack of interest in the sheep-man from the other side of the

range, but the threatening atmosphere was loosed of tension for the moment. Suddenly, from one of the men outside, was heard a startled exclamation.

"Sure looks like him," came a voice.

"By gosh, it is!"

There was a yell, followed by a chorus of eager voices, as a car came to a halt. Sheriff Gonzales went to the door, and his eyes widened; then he turned.

"It's Kennedy," he said.

Into the room came Hawkins—a gaunt sheep-man. He jerked off his hat to the girl.

"Howdy, folks—hear you're laid up, Tom. Got a feller says he works for you—him and that Injun, Johnny Gogetit. Seen 'em pluggin' along the road, and both of 'em durned near done for, believe me! This feller, he had the Injun on a rope—had chased him out o' the Eagletails. You want him, Sheriff?"

"Fetch 'em in," said the Sheriff.

"Dead beat," said somebody, and figures darkened the doorway.

KENNEDY was carried in, a limp, bloody, barely conscious figure. He was set in a chair, and managed a faint smile.

"By gosh, I got him!" he mumbled. "And if anybody says an Injun can't fight, you just—you—you—"

He relaxed, and his head drooped, and he went limp. Gonzales, at the door, shook his head to the men outside.

"Leave the Injun there," he said, and turned to the room. "Johnny's in the same shape—only worse," he announced. "By jingo, this was a chase! Kennedy fainted?"

"Asleep," said Piatt jerkily. "Run himself ragged and then had a scrap to get his man, and then brought him along! Gosh! Say, Tom, you got a man in a million bossing your range!"

Silence fell—uneasy, anxious silence. Jenkins, chewing at his cigar, was staring down at Red Kennedy. He shifted his look to the face of Gonzales, then glanced over and met the challenging gaze of Tom Enright.

"Well?" snapped Enright.

Jenkins removed his cigar, exhaled a stream of smoke, and shook his head.

"Nope," he said. "This aint the man I'm after, boys."

And he smiled.

The Great Samarkand

By

ROY NORTON

Illustrated by William Molt



The gifted author of "The Toll of the Sea," "The Unknown Mr. Kent" and "Drowned Gold" has never done a finer piece of writing than the swift-moving and dramatic conclusion of this fascinating novel. Even if you missed the first two installments, be sure to read this.

The Story So Far:

HERE I, John Roberts, gem expert for a great New York jewel-house, set down the extraordinary adventure which befell me in the matter of that huge and priceless ruby known as the Great Samarkand:

It began when Henry Wakefield, that extremely wealthy connoisseur of gems, brought the famous Samarkand into the store, and in the presence of my employer I identified the gem. Later Wakefield requested me to call at his house; and that fateful evening he told me the amazing story of his acquisition of the great ruby, and made to me his strange proposition.

In brief, the Samarkand had been given to him by a homeless Russian exile upon whom Wakefield had taken pity and whom he had for some time employed as gardener. The Russian's account of how he had come by it was the astounding thing, however. It seems that during the Bolshevik revolution a whole trainload of noted treasures of the Kremlin, of which the Samarkand ruby was one, was sent to Vladivostok for safekeeping. In Manchuria, however, the train was wrecked, attacked and looted by a band of Japanese, and all the guards save the man who later became Wakefield's gardener, were slain. All the

treasures, likewise, except the Samarkand,—which the lone survivor saved by chance, not knowing its value,—were carried off.

The man had been unable to dispose of the great stone—no one would believe it real. And Mr. Wakefield found himself in a similar quandary. He could not acknowledge possession of the stone without explaining where he got it, and paying the Customs duties upon it. He wished me, therefore, to take the ruby with me secretly on my next jewel-buying trip to Amsterdam, bring it back with me openly, declare it, pay the duty and then go through the form of selling it to him. Thus the status and ownership of the great jewel could be established. And I—I accepted his generous offer.

In Amsterdam I had certain rather quaint encounters with a Japanese named Takiyamo, with a Levantine called Hakim, and with two Russian Bolshevik agents selling certain jewels. But I paid no special attention to these acquaintances until on my return to New York, the Customs official discovered that—my ruby was glass! I had been robbed and an imitation substituted.

Henry Wakefield was a game sport. He accepted my story. More, he financed me in a desperate endeavor to recover the great



There was a plot afoot which was of vital interest to me.

ruby. And I forthwith set out on my quest for the so-precious needle in the great haystack of Europe. This quest led me first in pursuit of the Japanese Takiyamo, and eventually I ran him down in Milan—only to find that he too had been victimized: the Samarkand which he had filched from me in Amsterdam had been taken from him, presumably, according to the clues we had, by the Syrian Hakim. The Japanese became my ally—and valet—now; together we traced Hakim to Cairo; and journeyed thither hot on his trail. (*The story continues in detail:*)

"**TAKIYAMO,**" I said, addressing that worthy upon my return to my rooms in the Heliopolis House, "I have today seen your friend Hakim. I did not speak to him, for the very simple reason that he escaped me. Tomorrow I will take you to the place where I saw him. He will come that way again. It will be worth your while to wait there until he passes, to learn where he goes, to find out what he does."

His face portrayed neither surprise nor exultation; but I read in his eyes an emotion that would serve my purpose. He couldn't forgive the Syrian that betrayal. The Japanese are one of the oldest of civilized races; but they are still but an inch from the barbarian who has his own primitive instincts of reprisal. The desire to avenge himself would make of him a most excellent watchdog; and from the Orient he had inherited infinite patience to wait.

I set myself the task of keeping evening

watch over the place where Hakim was domiciled; and to make this watch easier, I rented a room across the street on the same level and exactly opposite his. And thus set in what were for me four as annoying days as one could devise. Of the Syrian's daytime habits we learned nothing. Nothing whatever! His night-time habits were even less certain, for on two nights he did not come to his apartment, and on the third he did not appear until three o'clock in the morning. But the fifth day brought me another surprise, quite as unexpected as any of the preceding.

Fronting the Ezbekiyeh Gardens is a row of buildings that, many years ago, were devoted to wealthy Levantines, but through long decline are now occupied by a great variety of tenants, many of whom are Greeks or Italians. Beneath these apartments are small shops and cafés. As I passed along the street on the garden side on that fifth afternoon, after long and useless tramping through the Muski, I glanced idly upward at the row of buildings opposite, and my eye caught the figure of a big man in shirt-sleeves who seemed to be pacing to and fro and talking to some one in the room. Suddenly he stopped, and leaning far out of the window, looked across the street as if seeking some one, smiled, and then waved a hand, gesticulating toward the café on the ground floor. Immediately in front of me, with loitering steps, was a man who was palpably an East Indian. I thought as I looked at him that he was of a Punjabi tribe. I might have

taken no further notice but for the fact that I was puzzling why the man who had come to the window in his shirt-sleeves had seemed familiar.

THE Punjabi crossed the street and seated himself at one of the tables set out under the arcade, and thinking that something cool to drink might not come amiss, I too crossed and seated myself just inside the door, and where, by leaning slightly forward, I could observe the East Indian. I was still incurious enough to pay no attention to him, and after ordering my glass of beer sat staring at the tric-trac players, the coffee-bibbers, and the groups of men in European clothing save for the prevalent red or scarlet tarboosh with swaying black tassels.

It was when I reached across the not too cleanly marble-topped table to pick up my glass that the surprise came; for it brought into view the Punjabi, and he had been joined by two men with whom he had entered into conversation. I sat for a moment with the glass suspended in mid-air. It was difficult to believe the truth of my eyesight, for unless I was vastly mistaken, the two Europeans seated with the East Indian were the very same Bolsheviks from whom I had bought a few jewels in Amsterdam! I was so hesitant to accept this identification that I half-stood to my feet, staring until certain. But I was fully convinced when I heard the Russians interchange some remarks in their native tongue, which their companion evidently did not understand, inasmuch as they immediately afterward dropped into Greek which seemed to be their common lingual meeting-point. For a moment I was tempted to step out of my obscurity and speak to them, and then some sense of caution impelled me to withdraw from sight into my corner. Their words did not entirely come to me, but now and then I could catch whole sentences, or enough to follow the conversation. And within a minute I was extremely glad that I had not been observed; for there could be no doubt that there was a plot afoot which was of vital interest to me.

They were talking of Hakim, and what they referred to as "Our Red Stone," quite a fitting name from their viewpoint, inasmuch it would be difficult to convince any Bolshevik that the Samarkand didn't belong to the Soviet government. Possession through murder, or robbery, evidently

constituted in their code clear title to property—so long as such acts were inflicted on the other fellow!

The plot that they were concocting was one of the most astounding schemes that had ever come within my knowledge. And these conspirators, observing none within hearing, somewhat warmed up by potations, were almost childishly loquacious over it, as might be expected from human beings merely cunning rather than cautious. I gathered that the Punjabi was a convert to Bolshevism and had been an active agent in propaganda in India until Bombay had become a trifle too hot for him. The Russians had first suspected Hakim of having the Samarkand in Amsterdam, where he had approached them with some indiscreet inquiries, possibly with a view to a future sale. They too had traced him to Cairo, his extraordinary bulk and appearance rendering him easy to follow.

In a way they had been more successful than I after reaching the Egyptian capital, for they knew not only where he roomed but where he did business in the Muski; but they too had met with the same puzzling obstacle, how to learn where he kept the ruby. They were convinced it wasn't in the Muski, and it seemed that they had gained access to his rooms and, unsuspected by him, had conducted a thorough search. Evidently they hadn't hesitated at burglary; but under the circumstances I couldn't blame them for that, because I'd have cheerfully, and without straining my conscience, burgled him myself if given an opportunity. So now they had come to concoct a new plan suggested by the Punjabi's presence in exile.

A CERTAIN Maharajah was en route from India for London and Paris. His fame as an owner of precious stones and pearls was so world-wide that I opened my ears when I heard his name, for he was reputed to have in the pearls of his regalia alone nearly eight million dollars in value, and the rubies in his possession were supposed to be worth nearly treble that sum. He was also known to be perpetually in the market for rare gems, but only the rarest. He was known to be difficult of approach, and inaccessible to the average dealer. The plan of the Bolsheviks was extremely good because of its simplicity.

The Punjabi, who was unknown in Cairo, and sufficiently unknown in Alexandria for his purpose, was to be supplied with funds,

to disappear, and return by train in some small state; after which without too much ostentation, he was to register at Spinard's Hotel, and the rumor was to be set in motion that he was a confidential agent of the Maharajah. He was to visit the greatest jewel-shops of the city seeking rubies, and none but the rarest could interest him. Likewise he was to visit the Muski dealers on the same quest. If it became necessary to prove his good faith, he might even buy a rare stone or two, and in such dealing he was to let it be known that he had contempt for anything relative to the source from which his purchases were derived. All that would interest him would be the stone itself, not the title to it. He was to



*He said with pretended annoyance:
"No, fool! Don't disturb us."*

make the significant remark that once a ruby came to his hands no power on earth could keep it from going to and thereafter remaining in India.

The more I listened, the more feasible his plan appeared. The Muski is as weird a gossiping-place as there is on earth. With all its scores of thousands, news of any kind sweeps through it as if printed and distributed on handbills. Despite its size, it is almost impossible for any foreigner to make a large purchase within any of its quarters without the fact being broadcasted. It runs like wild-fire through the street of the saddlers, the streets of the

tailors, of the wool-merchants, of the metal-workers, of the perfume-dealers; and all wait as hopeful as vultures for their turn at this peregrinating Cræsus; for to the native, all foreigners are rich. The Punjabi would be a marked man within forty-eight hours, his business known, his importance exaggerated; and Hakim would come to him, unless wiser than seemed probable. He was not to seek Hakim; but on the contrary was to make it difficult for Hakim to converse with him. After that, their plans were to be made to suit the situation.

Unfortunately for me, the crowds that

awake after the warmer hours of the day were beginning to close in, and the tables were being filled. The peculiar humming conversation of the East had arisen from silence to a drone. The tric-trac players were becoming so numerous that the sharp clicks of their markers sounded like machines in constant motion. Seats were becoming scarcer, and a quartet took the one adjoining that of the plotters, who thereupon became cautious. I gathered that the reason they had met in the café, rather than in their rooms, was that somebody whom they didn't wholly trust had been with them, but was leaving on the morrow, and that in future that would be their rendezvous. And then the Punjabi arose, made his adieus and went down the street.

A minute later, after paying their bill, the Russians also departed, and I was free to go. I went with a whirling head. So many possibilities, contingencies, recourses had been opened by that formidable plan evolved over a café table within my hearing! I couldn't make a decision as to my own best action; but of one feature I was certain, that in the immediate future it was the Punjabi, or the Russians, whom I must watch, rather than the Syrian. I blessed my good fortune in knowing Greek, hitherto somewhat unappreciated; for without it I could not have gleaned what I had.

ARNI, his shrewd Swiss face wrinkled with a droll smile, met me as I entered the hotel, and beckoned me to an empty seat in the lounge, away from the crowd that seemed always to fill the Heliopolis House at that hour of the evening.

"I've found out something more about that man Hakim," he said. "He hasn't any regular place of business. He's supposed to be a sort of runner, a go-between, in the jewel-bazaars. He has a dozen or so for whom he works, scalping commissions. He's supposed to be a trifle tricky, yet has made money out of the trade, or so they say. But as far as a fixed place goes, he has none. Also, like most Syrians, he's a linguist. Gets in with visitors at the big hotels, steers them into the hands of two men who really work for him, who pose as guides, and—the usual thing! Gets a fat commission from all sales. But when it comes to any big deal, he handles it himself. Naturally, for all he can get out of it! Now, is there anything else I can help you with?"

"Not that I can think of at the moment," I said, and thanked him for his information. The fact that Hakim had no fixed business place made it difficult. I must consider all aspects of the new situation.

In my perplexity regarding a campaign to pursue, I strolled out that evening to the room I had rented which afforded me a post of espionage over Hakim's apartments. There was no light in his rooms. I sat for a time wondering how the Russians had gained access, whether by false keys, or the bribery of the *barwab* who sat complacently on a stool by the door, turban-wrapped, head-swaddled and gossiping with two other natives who squatted at his feet as if in the presence of a minor god. A tram tore noisily along the street in front, so close to the curb on the opposite side that I wondered how the tenants of the front rooms could endure the clanking hubbub. I fell to speculating as to what kind of neighbors Hakim had, and then idly recalled the fact that I had never seen a light in the apartment on the floor adjoining his. It gave me an idea, and I left my own room, went downstairs, crossed the street and entered the hallway next to Hakim's.

There were the same brass plates with most of the names in Arabic, and my mind jumped a cog when I saw beneath one of them, designating the third floor, was a card which, translated, would read: "*Furnished apartment to let until May 1st.*" The name signed beneath was a Greek one, and the agent's name was Italian. The card was dirty, and thumbred, as if by the idle, curious hands of many native messenger-boys. I made a memorandum of the address, for it came to me that there might be possibilities in becoming Hakim's near neighbor. When I went out into the street I studied the position. There was a balcony, uniform and inevitable in the East, that was private; but the distance between the end of Hakim's balcony and the one adjoining was six or seven feet. There seemed no possibility of its being of use unless one dared risk his neck by leaping and taking the chances of a fall to the pavement below, so that was out of the question. But there might be some means of tapping the wall between the two rooms so that one could at least overhear. I could not afford to leave any chance unprospected, and resolved that my first business of the following morning would be to examine that flat.

It proved to be a small and shabbily appointed apartment, and I was not surprised to learn that it had been untenanted for several months during the absence of its owner in the Levant. On the wall separating it from Hakim's living-room were hung the cheap, imitation tapestries so prevalent in that class of furnishing in the Near East, and it gave me a suggestion, inasmuch as I had observed from across the street that similar hangings covered that side of the room in Hakim's apartment. Then and there I rented the place for the full term. An hour after receiving the keys, I had returned with a large ordinary auger purchased in the native street, and set to work.

The houses of Cairo and its suburbs are built of chalky rock that, although strong enough in mass to form walls, is comparatively soft until exposed and aged. The houses of that long row were not old. By nightfall I had drilled a cluster of holes through the wall about eight feet up from the floor, and slanting downward. I broke the thin partitions carefully away and had thus a hole of about six inches square. Then to my satisfaction I found that Hakim's hangings were of the Japanese laticed variety, and that through the cracks between the narrow strips of bamboo I could look as through a screen without running any risks of being discovered, provided the lights in my room were not turned on. I could overlook almost his entire living-room and thus I had established an excellent point for observation and hearing.

NEXT I fell to wondering how I could better my outpost, and made a small trapdoor that would snugly fit on Hakim's side and would escape anything but close inspection if, for any untoward reason, he had his hangings removed. Moreover I went out and purchased sufficient plaster of paris completely to repair the damage done when once my purpose was served. Inasmuch as many similar repairs had been made in the walls, I knew that this part would prove easy.

I slipped out quietly in that swift dusk which falls over the desert, went to my hotel, and told Takiyamo that he was to move to my room across from Hakim's and thereafter keep watch on that side. It was useless to keep him posted in the Muski, and furthermore it was now my object to keep Hakim from seeing him, all

of which I explained. I said nothing to him of having the apartment next to Hakim's. There was no reason why I should have withheld the information, because the Japanese, say what one will of them, have, now and then, the gift of fidelity. Either that, or an Oriental inspiration for discovering and selecting the side of bread which is best buttered. Perhaps he had no gratitude, for that is not a racial characteristic; but he did seem to have determined to tie his fortunes to mine. His motives didn't matter, however, because I was convinced that I could depend upon him. Hence it was that after the soft Egyptian night had fallen—bringing stars that had the brilliancy of diamonds into a field of infinite depths of royal blue; seeing the last of the camel-trains which patiently carried all day the loads of building material on their dust-covered backs; making audible in the quiet dusk the gentle *slip-slip-slip* of *fellahin* bare feet, homeward bound—Takiyamo was transferred to his new quarters and duly instructed.

I hesitated, then engaged from the cab rank in front of the tiny kiosk opposite the hotel a taxi, and lazily enjoyed the drive to Cairo and Spinard's hotel. The terrace was filled with languid groups. The interior was brilliant with light; and Myers, the Swiss concierge, nodded affably. A party of late Nile tourists exposed their ignorance of the East by familiarity with dragomen. The pillars leading to the central salon loomed heavy and mysterious, like great portals of dead pharaohs. The alleyway to the left, after passing the concierge's desk, was brilliant with its interior shop displays, and in the first one at hand, I saw, clad in quiet dignity, surrounded by fluttering and attentive salesmen and proprietors, languidly inspecting gems, the Bolshevik Punjabi. He had arrived. He was at work spinning the webs with which he hoped to enmesh Hakim. And, smiling to myself, I retraced my steps and passed on through the central hall to the gardens; thinking that he was also working in my behalf. Walking over the graveled paths beneath the palms I most fervently wished him luck in advertisement.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR two long and miserable days I awaited developments, until the weaknesses of my plans became magnified. Pre-

suming that Hakim did get in contact with the Punjabi, what was to prevent his taking the Samarkand to Spinard's hotel to attempt a sale? Or to make a rendezvous elsewhere—in the rooms of the Bolsheviks, for instance?

The one reason I could discover against this was that the Bolshevik trio had not the slightest intention of purchasing the gem, and that robbery in a place as populous as Spinard's hotel would be improbable; nor was it likely that Hakim, with all that cunning of his, would go to a place of meeting selected by the Punjabi. Again, it wasn't likely that the Punjabi would go to a place chosen by Hakim unless it served his purpose, which was that of robbery. Furthermore, it would be taken as a certainty that he wouldn't make his attempt single-handed against such a man as Hakim, but would depend upon the assistance of his Russian comrades. It still seemed to me that Hakim's room would be chosen by himself for the meeting-place, because he could depend upon the assistance of his two barbaric servants, henchmen, or whatever their status might be. But for these two Sudanese the place would be admirably suited to the plans of the Bolsheviks, and I wondered if, learning of the two Sudanese, they would take the risk of trying to pull off their stroke in Hakim's apartments.

I TRIED to formulate some plan of further protecting myself against the possibility of the jewel's being taken from Hakim in some other place, but couldn't. I felt peculiarly helpless in all this worry, and passed my daylight hours therefore in keeping such watch as I could over the movements of the Punjabi, and the nights in camping in my new apartment until Hakim appeared and retired. I counted on Takiyamo's night watch to forestall any unexpected departure between that hour and morning. I shouldn't have kept the Japanese at that, even, if there had been any other conceivable way of using his services. I doubted, somewhat, whether he would prove an efficient shadow in case Hakim did leave in some early hour, but had to take the risks, because it was essential to my plans that Hakim should not change his rooms without my knowledge. The one consoling thought was that Hakim wasn't likely to pack his belongings and leave unless something alarmed him, and that in such event he would certainly not

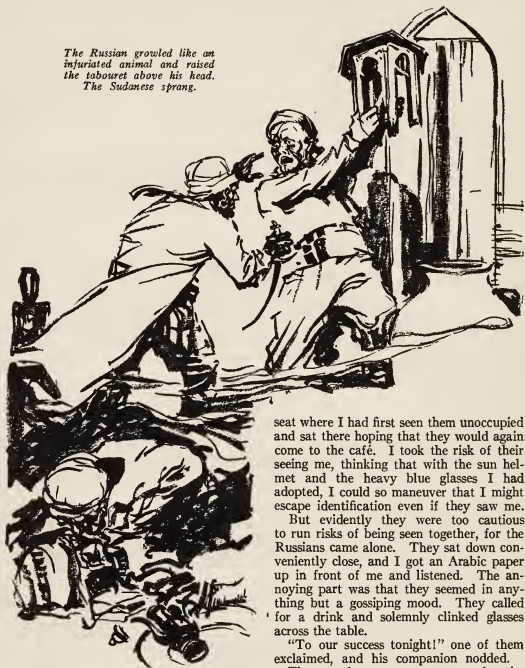
be fool enough to make such removal in broad daylight lest he be followed. Unless he blundered into the Russians, there seemed no danger of his becoming alarmed; and they, I knew, proposed to keep out of his sight, for they had said so when concocting their plan to entrap him through the Punjabi. In the end, therefore, I depended somewhat desperately, but hopefully, on the presumption that the robbery would take place from Hakim's apartment, after which my turn must come. There was no other possible hope or way that I could think of, and so I was compelled to play the slow game of patience.

THEN on the fourth day came news that threw me into the depths for a moment, raised me to hope the next, and set me to speculating in the third. It was nothing less than the announcement in the *Daily Egyptian Mail* that His Highness the Maharajah had altered his plans and had abandoned for the time being his proposed visit to Cairo and would sail direct to Marseilles with all his selected staff. At first I was inclined to think this news would completely upset the Bolshevik plans. The Punjabi, in his pretended capacity of confidential agent to the Maharajah, would have no pretext for remaining longer but would, on the contrary, be compelled to make an immediate departure. Then came the point that gave fresh hope—namely, that if Hakim had already got in contact with him, this would hasten matters to a climax, and if he had not, and intended to act at all, he must now do so immediately.

I loitered around Spinard's that day but caught no sight of the Punjabi; yet the wait was not without one gain; for while sitting in the dark recess of the first lounge I saw Hakim enter, stop for a moment's conversation at the desk, and then produce a letter which he handed across before he walked out. I had time to reach the desk and engage the clerk in conversation before he picked the letter up, and saw that it was addressed to the East Indian. I would have given much to know the contents of that missive, and stood there for a moment trying to think of any means by which this could be accomplished without arousing suspicion. It was hopeless. I was tempted to try bribery, or theft—when who should appear but the Punjabi in person!

I retreated immediately to my previous retreat and watched him. He opened the letter, grinned with apparent exultation and

The Russian growled like an infuriated animal and raised the tabouret above his head. The Sudanese sprang.



hurriedly thrust the letter into his pocket and made for the door. I was at his heels before he had descended to the street from the terrace, and was behind him as he passed quickly and directly across to the street leading behind a triangular group of buildings into the Sharia el-Genainch, fronting the Ezbekiyeh Gardens. He glanced around furtively as if to make certain that he was not followed, and then bolted up the stairway leading to the rooms of the Russian Bolsheviks.

I crossed over to the café and found the

seat where I had first seen them unoccupied and sat there hoping that they would again come to the café. I took the risk of their seeing me, thinking that with the sun helmet and the heavy blue glasses I had adopted, I could so maneuver that I might escape identification even if they saw me.

But evidently they were too cautious to run risks of being seen together, for the Russians came alone. They sat down conveniently close, and I got an Arabic paper up in front of me and listened. The annoying part was that they seemed in anything but a gossiping mood. They called for a drink and solemnly clinked glasses across the table.

"To our success tonight!" one of them exclaimed, and his companion nodded.

They sat for a moment more and spoke in Russian, with which I wasn't sufficiently familiar to get anything of value; and then came some words I did understand, just a few, cutting through a sentence, and the paper in my hand must have trembled; for they had named the street and number of Hakim's apartment. They paid their bill without further speech, got up soberly like men confronted with a serious enterprise, and departed. And I, convinced that my long patience was to be rewarded to some extent, passed out in the opposite direction and took a taxi back to Heliopolis.

If they succeeded in getting the Samarkand from the Syrian, it would be hard luck indeed if I didn't find some way of getting it from them, though I had to follow them clear back to Amsterdam!

I HESITATED whether to confide fully in Takiyamo, but could see no way to avoid it, and so told him what I had learned.

"Therefore," I instructed him, "you must keep alert on watch tonight. If they do what I think they will, or will at least try, they will overpower Hakim, or drug him, and make away with the stone. If they succeed in that, they may separate outside the door. We may be certain that the jewel will be in the pockets of one of the Russians. So neither of us need care where the Punjabi goes. We must follow the Russians and try to recover the Samarkand. If they in turn separate, still it must be done by either one of us if an opportunity comes. If the opportunity doesn't come, we mustn't lose track of them, and must follow on, waiting for another chance."

He thought it over for a time and then shook his head.

"No, they will not get the ruby, sair, because Hakim will have his two Sudanese to help. They may try, but they will not get it."

"Then if they fail, we shall know this—that he has the ruby there in his apartment. And, Takiyamo, we've got to get that ruby from him before morning! Either way, we shall know tonight where the Samarkand is—for tonight at least—and that has been the one thing we couldn't learn until now. Can I depend on you?"

I never thought him a coward. I knew, in fact, that he had some bravery, and that his was a cunning mind; but when he hesitated I said, somewhat testily: "What's wrong? Why do you pause? Are you afraid?"

He shook his head and gestured a negative with his hands.

"I am afraid of nothing if you will look after me," he said, and when I stared at him in perplexity, he added: "I am afraid of being left alone in a strange land with no money, no friends, no—"

"You have my word that none of these things shall happen to you," I asserted. "If you are afraid that this may get us into trouble, I'll tell you here and now that I'm not going to leave you in the lurch.

And what is more, Takiyamo," I finished, "if this affair goes through successfully, I'll see that you are as well off as you were before you fell for the Samarkand."

"I will do my best," was all I got from him, and had to content myself with this assurance; but I felt that it was lacking, that on him I could not depend too much, that I must rely principally upon myself through whatever the night's vicissitudes might bring. It wasn't a pleasant outlook. I was one man against an unscrupulous Syrian giant, two barbaric Sudanese, a Punjabi fanatic, and a couple of Russians for whom murder was merely a pleasurable and amusing pastime. Small wonder, then, that when I slipped into my apartment adjoining Hakim's that evening, my affair didn't look too roseate, or flowering with hope.

I drew the shades, pulled the table that I used for a stand to the side of the partition wall, removed the shoddy tapestries, turned off the lights, and waited. Peering through the hole I had drilled in the wall, I saw that the adjoining room was still in darkness. Not a sound came betokening occupancy. At frequent intervals, with a roar and clatter and clash, the tram-cars passed in front of the apartments. The voices of loitering natives came in constant murmurs as they moved to and fro in the street. The cries of the late vendors of soured milk,—"*Laba-a-a-a-n!*" weird and long-drawn,—became less frequent, died away to an occasional call, then finished. Distantly I heard the Muezzin's last call of the day, the Moslem vespers. Faintly came the sounds of the band on the terrace of the Heliopolis House, playing a modern American air and telling me that the evening's dance had begun. The first smashing rattle of a *ghafir's* staff hurled along the pavement and accompanied by his raucous shout, warned me that the night watch had assumed its post, and—still there was no light in Hakim's rooms.

CRAMPED and stiff from that prolonged and uncomfortable position necessitated by my standing erect on the top of a small table with my face close against a hole in the wall, I climbed down and stretched my tired legs. I pulled the jalousies aside and stared across the street. The long row of stately buildings was dark. The lights of the shops beneath the lofty arches were extinguished, and only here and there the soft illumination of balconies told me that

the hour was not yet hopelessly late. I peered at the place where Takiyamo should be on watch, but it was quiet and black, as if absorbed in vacancy or sleep. In stocking feet I paced my tiles, and despair became paramount of emotions. I had staked everything on false and illogical presumptions, and lost! I took my watch from my pocket and learned that it was nearly eleven o'clock, and started toward

off his tarboosh and laid it on a stand, after which he went to a sideboard and poured himself a drink, hesitated, bent down and apparently took stock of his refreshment supplies, as if with a thoughtful view to hospitality, then closed the door and left the room. I heard his feet ascending the stairway outside, and then for a few minutes all was still, save for the slow and dignified ticking of a clock somewhere beyond my view. Then came steps descending and he reappeared, accompanied by his two Sudanese who were now clad in clean *galabeas*, red slippers with their toes gold embroidered, red tarbooshes, and broad red cummerbunds about their waists—impressive servants awaiting a distinguished guest.



the doorway, groping for the light-switch and ready to call the day lost. I found it, and with my finger upon it, paused. Was there not a bare chance that a late hour of appointment would best suit the Punjabi's plans? That he might have told the Syrian that previous appointments would prevent his coming until late? That he had taken the attitude of one who cared but little whether he came at all, and then fixed a time that might be deemed the most suitable for his purpose? Perhaps!

MY fingers came away from the light-switch and I felt my way along the wall, quietly remounted the table, and again put my face to the observation hole. Darkness still dominated. I listened, and heard nothing. Silence was still over all. I was actually turning my head away and feeling for the little trap with which I closed the aperture, when a noise arrested me, and listening, I heard the metallic click of a key in a lock, and an instant later, saw that the lights had been switched on. Hakim had come home, and his deal was either completed, or about to begin.

In his spotless white linen suit, Hakim moved about here and there. He took

The Syrian looked at the clock, and then gave orders in his classic Arabic, for the Syrians use that tongue with greater purity than the Egyptians, and his precise words proved that he proposed to make no mistakes:

"Mustapha, you will serve as I will demand, for the effendi will doubtless enjoy some wine. So you will remain in the room all the time, awaiting my orders. And you, Ali, will go into the next room and keep still. Not a noise—not a sound. I do not expect that there will be the slightest need for you; but you are to think of yourself as a guard on duty, for I must take no risks. Now listen! I am going to show the effendi who comes, a stone of value—of a value so great that if men of the bazaars knew it was here tonight they would cut a hundred throats to gain it. If this sale is made, neither you nor your children's children shall ever want."

The Sudanese both salaamed, and the very tribal scars across their cheeks glowed with anticipation and obedience. There was no doubt in my mind of their loyalty to their master. Hakim himself seemed

the most excited of the trio, and now walked across the room and lowered the jalousies guarding the veranda, came back, nervously impatient, looked again at the clock, consulted his watch as if to compare the indicated time, picked up his tarboosh and told one of his *wallahs* to hang it on the rack. Then he hastily donned a turban, again opened the bottom of the sideboard and staring within, asked the man Mustapha if he had got the tub of cracked ice for the wine. His servants stood respectfully to one side, stolid, waiting, with arms folded, resting their weights on one foot and then the other in that careless and natural grace characteristic of the East. Hakim alone started at a sound which I could not hear.

"The effendi comes," he said, and gestured with his hand toward Ali.

The latter smiled, exposing the wonderful teeth of the native, bowed and, noiseless as a shadow, disappeared into the rear room. Mustapha stood alert, listening, with his head slightly turned to one side, and Hakim composed himself and walked to the end of the table that stood in the center of the room. The ringing of the electric door-bell sounded faintly to my ears; Hakim nodded, and Mustapha disappeared. The distant opening of a door, vague voices in salutation, swinging of curtains, and, preceded by the bowing Sudanese, I saw the Punjabi coming forward with extended hand. Behind him, stolid, neither bowing nor smiling, but acting the part of a well-trained servant, stood a massive man of some European race.

For an instant I stood there on my table staring, puzzled, wondering what new factor had been introduced into this weird chase of mine. My eyes fell on Hakim, who, having greeted his guest, was looking inquiringly at the man standing motionless in the door.

"My personal guard," the Punjabi explained with a gentle wave of his hand, and then smiling and turning his back upon the man in the opening, he added: "I never go into the city at night without him. It is not safe for one such as I, who am known to be the confidential agent of His Highness the Maharajah, and supposed to have always upon my person things of value."

He burst into a derisive laugh and held his palms upward.

"Yet did the covetous but know, all that could be gained from me would be nothing.

Nothing! A thousand piasters! My ring—which as you see is but a tiny band of gold such as a peasant might disdain. But I am a timid man, Hakim. I do not wish to be struck with knife or club. So I guard against such attack. My man can be trusted. He will but wait until I am ready to leave."

And while he talked, my eyes had been fixed on the man who stood motionless in the opening of the curtains beside the Sudanese. The Punjabi made a languid gesture of dismissal. The white man responded by a salute, and then something in his gesture, some movement of his arm, perhaps his profile, told me who he was: one of the precious pair of Muscovite Bolsheviks who had sacrificed his beard and drooping mustaches to the exigencies of proposed robbery. He let the curtains fall behind him and disappeared. Vague sounds told me that he had seated himself in the tiny entryway waiting for the time when he must act.

The Punjabi, with the air of a man bored but conferring a favor, seated himself by the table, yawned, turned toward Hakim and said: "I see so many things that would be of no interest whatever to His Highness. Now, about this stone that you think is the Samarkand—"

"But first let me display some hospitality," said Hakim in the Greek tongue which had been fluently adopted by the Punjabi. "I trust that your caste does not prohibit it, or your religion, sir?"

"Both," said the Punjabi, with a slight smile. "But—there are dispensations!"

The Syrian laughed as if appreciating a joke and called for Mustapha, and in Arabic told him to bring French champagne.

"It is the fitting libation for a deal involving a stone of such magnificence as the Samarkand," he said, smiling at the Punjabi, and the latter gravely bent his head.

NEITHER appeared to be in haste. Indeed, they had the air of the Eastern dealer who frequently cares less for sale or purchase than the profuse bargaining which precedes such, that play of wits against wits. When the wine came, they were still in no haste. They sat discussing many things while Mustapha, the Sudanese, skillfully twirled the bottle in its bed of ice. Nor did either seem in haste to drink when it was poured into the shallow glasses. Of the two Hakim drank the

more, but if he had hoped to loosen the Punjabi to the liberality induced by intoxication, he might as well have poured water on a stone. Once I saw the Punjabi by a skillful movement empty his glass into the ice-bucket with a motion so swift, so graceful, that a stage conjurer might have envied him his deftness. His air of bored waiting continued. Finally he yawned, with his slender, pale brown fingers held politely before his splendid beard, glanced at the clock, and said: "The hour grows late. It is after midnight. You brought me here to prove that you have the great ruby for sale. Well, let me see it. We can then discuss terms, and if we agree, you may bring it to me at Spinard's tomorrow and I shall have the money waiting for your delivery. But I am still skeptical that you have the most prized ruby in existence in your keeping."

"And are you prepared to—to—ask no questions as to how I got it?" Hakim asked, coming bluntly to the point.

"None whatever. I care not how you got it, or whence it came. All I am interested in is the stone itself and—the price you demand."

THE Syrian, as if to assure himself of protection, looked over to where the Sudanese, Mustapha, was still standing by the end of the sideboard with folded arms and impassive face, then opened his shirt, thrust his hand inside, fumbled for a moment at a sling and produced a case which he sprung open and thrust toward his guest. My heart jumped, for once again I saw the leaping fires of that glorious gem. There could be no doubt of it. Even at that distance its magnificence, its great luster, its brilliance of scintillation were inimitable. The Punjabi, self-controlled as he was, started, stared, and for a moment looked at it without movement. He sat facing my loophole, and I could see his widened eyes glitter, his lips part, his neck bend stiffly forward as if all incredulity had given way to amazed astonishment. The Syrian sat immobile, watchful, waiting, until the Punjabi's hands stretched forward and picked up the case. For a moment he held it in the fingers of both hands, then arose to his feet, leaned across the table, took the stone from its bed, and held it up to the light.

"Marvelous! The stone of stones!" he exclaimed in a voice that was shrill with delight.

And then what happened took place so quickly that had my eyes been diverted for more than a fraction of a second, I could not have observed the action.

AS if his words had been a signal, the huge Muscovite swept aside the curtains of the entryway, bawling in his native tongue: "Gaspadine, you called me—"

I was aware that Hakim's head turned with a start at this unexpected interruption, that the Sudanese had also looked in that direction, and in the same sweeping glance observed a mere flirt of the Punjabi's hands and twitch of robes; then he too turned and said with pretended annoyance, in Greek: "No, fool! I didn't call you. Go back and sit down. Don't disturb us."

For a moment or two more he held the stone in the palm of his hand, turning it this way and that, squinting at it from many angles, and then quietly replaced it in its case, snapped the lid shut, laid it on the table in front of him, and reseated himself. The Syrian had recovered also, and leaned back in his chair.

"I couldn't have believed it!" the Punjabi said, quite as if to himself. "Indeed I didn't believe it. I didn't think it possible that you could have the Samarkand. But"—he pointed with a slender finger at the closed case—"it is there. Undoubtedly that is it. I am ready to purchase it. Let us waste no time. What is your price?"

The Syrian's huge shoulders hunched forward, and he brought one great hand down on the table. He impressed me as pent with excitement and eagerness. The light reflected from his blue-black hair as if it too were quivering.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, Egyptian," he said.

He uttered that splendid figure, the equivalent of nearly a million and a quarter dollars, as if he were naming a bargain price. And to tell the truth, I will admit that, stupendous as it seemed, he was. But the man confronting him was too much of the Orient himself to show his real feelings.

"By the gods of my fathers! You ask enough!" he exclaimed, raising his hands in a deprecatory gesture, but not lifting his level, musical voice. He picked the case up, opened the lid toward Hakim as if to have another glance at the stone, then snapped it shut again and tossed it once more on the table.

"No, my friend," he said. "There are two reasons why I shall not pay that price.

First, it is just fifty thousand pounds more than I can command from His Highness without long consultation. And second,"—he bent forward and fixed his dark and melancholy eyes on Hakim's,—“you will take less, because you wish to have no questions asked how you came by the Samarkand, and wish no one to know from me where it was purchased.”

His laugh was nearly malevolent as he stated what was to the Syrian an uncomfortable truth.

“Not a piaster less than a quarter of a million pounds, cash!” Hakim declared, banging his hand downward.

“And not a piaster more than I offered,” said the Punjabi in turn, with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

For a time they stared at each other like duelists, and I knew that it would be the Syrian who would weaken. His hand trembled as he reached for the case as if to put it away and end the matter, and then drew back and laughed.

“Well, there is no use in our parting bad friends,” he said. “Mustapha, pour us some more wine. You are negligent of my guest.”

THEY saluted each other, but again the Punjabi did not drink all of his, although Hakim swallowed his at a draft as if to steady his nerves before saying: “Come. Be reasonable. It matters not to an Indian potentate what he pays for the greatest gem in the universe. A gem that in the heavenly constellation would rank as the moon to all other luminaries.”

The Punjabi shook his head and smiled. “Then see here,” Hakim went on. “I will allow you a commission—a commission so big that you need never again feel compelled to take employment.”

“I am not one who is unfaithful to his salt. I take no commissions. I offer you two hundred thousand pounds, payable in cash tomorrow. Think of it! A fortune to any but one like His Highness.”

The Syrian was yielding. He pleaded; he stormed; he conceded twenty-five thousand pounds, and swore that it was his final word; but to all, the Punjabi remained obdurate. Had I not been convinced that the Bolsheviks had no intention of paying such an amount for the Samarkand, I should have believed him in deadly earnest. I actually began to wonder if, through a change of plan, it was not their intent to buy and then dispose of the gem at a hand-

some profit. And then, at last, after the Punjabi had arisen to go and declared the deal off, Hakim surrendered, swearing that he had been robbed, that nothing but exigency could influence him to accept such a price, and pretended a vast surliness. Then he changed front, had more wine poured to seal the bargain, and they stood up for their final toast. The Punjabi called to his supposed servant, adjusted the dark robes across his lithe chest, said: “Tomorrow, then, at three o'clock in the afternoon, you are to bring me the stone, and together we will go to the bank for the money.”

He turned toward the door to make his departure, and I thought he was narrowly watching Hakim; for the latter, although profuse in words, still stood by the table. Now, while still talking, he reached across, picked up the case and almost idly opened it. Suddenly he gave a roar and held the case up to the light.

“By Allah!” he cried in Arabic. “This is no stone! Where is it?”

And the proof that the Punjabi knew some Arabic was given by his ready start and terse reply: “That is no stone, you say? Impossible! It has fooled me, then, for it is the only one I have seen. You must be mistaken!”

There was no wait. It was as if the room had been so charged with distrust that nothing more was required to cause an explosion. The Punjabi sprang toward the door; but quick as he was, the Syrian, despite his enormous size, was quicker. “Mustapha! Ali!” he shouted as he sprang. His outstretched hands caught the Pun-



Down the street I saw a man running, and another figure in pursuit.



jabi's robe and jerked its wearer back within reach, and seized him. The Russian was springing to his confederate's aid, when Mustapha's black hands shot forth and seized round his throat. The Russian struggled like a bear, and more powerful than the Sudanese, succeeded in loosening the black hands, lifted his assailant up high over his head, and brought him crashing, head foremost, to the tiled floor, where he lay as still as if his head had been crushed. The victor stood bent and glaring at the black as if to make certain that he was incapable of another attack, saw Ali, the second Sudanese, coming, and suddenly thrust the fingers of one hand between his lips and gave three quick, shrill whistles, and with the other hand sought to detain the new enemy. Ali evaded his clutch, sprang like a panther around the end of the table, and went to the assistance of his master, who had become abruptly limp, and sagged on his great legs as if nothing save savage determination kept him on them and enabled him to maintain the throttling hold of his huge hands on the Punjabi's throat. I could not discern what had happened in that side of the conflict—what had happened to so weaken the giant, why he should not have the physical advantage; and then I saw a swift sheen of whipped steel. It appeared to make a brief inverted arc of glittering light impelled by a black hand, and suddenly the Punjabi crumpled downward, Hakim fell with him, released his hold, rolled over; and I saw that the

breast of his white coat, of his silken shirt, of his scarlet girdle, were all red. The blade of the Punjabi, probably concealed beneath his black robes up to the final moment, had been repeatedly driven home.

The Russian in the meantime had seized a heavy Eastern tabouret of teak, inlaid with ivory and pearl, and was charging; but now when he saw the Syrian and the Punjabi on the floor, the latter mute and motionless, the Sudanese Ali standing crouched with a long, curved, slender Arabic blade in his hand, he paused in bewilderment at this quick ending. The pause cost him his life, for when he growled like an infuriated animal and raised the tabouret high above his head, the Sudanese was ready, and suddenly sprang.

It was so incredibly quick, the combined movement, that it seemed timed by Fate. The knife swished upward, twisted and was fixed in the Bolshevik's heart. The heavy tabouret descended at the same moment, and crashing through red tarboosh and skull, rebounded into the air and fell on the rug. Both men dropped as if pole-axed; but the Russian still had such great vitality that he rolled and twitched. And even then as I stood, horror-bound—I will admit it!—there was a quick grating at the door, the turn of a safety lock, and into the room charged the third of that precious trio of Bolsheviks, who had evidently been stationed outside, been summoned by the whistled signals, and with his skeleton key had come to his comrades' support.

HE stared for an instant, wild-eyed and perplexed, rushed across to his countryman, who was now motionless, lifted his head, repeatedly called, "Ivan! Ivan!" and then, gaining no response, lowered the listless dead man to the floor, knelt, crossed himself, mumbled a hasty prayer for the dying, and stared at the Punjabi, whose crumpled attitude betrayed his end. He arose, for an instant stood, stocky, terrified and hesitant, and then peered about him at the fallen men as if unable to appreciate realities. He moved toward the Punjabi, seemed loath to touch, investigate and confirm death, and dropping to his knees, stared at the upturned face.

Then the man got to his feet, ran a bewildered hand over his forehead, stared again, saw the open jewel-case on the table, leaped forward, seized it, shut it, hastily thrust it into the inner pocket of his coat and turned toward the door. The curtain

rustled, swayed and settled. The outer door clashed shut, and in the room was a silence that assumed enormous profundities after the turmoil that had so speedily passed therein.

I jumped from the table and ran out to my balcony. Down the street toward the corner of the abandoned stadium I saw a man running through the circle of light thrown by the arc lamp at the intersection, and then immediately after saw another running figure in pursuit—the surviving Bolshevik and Takiyamo! For a moment only I hesitated, and then ran to the end of my balcony. The street was untenanted, as far as I could see, save for a late-houred native café a long distance away, where lights shone on tarboosh and *galabea*, on scattered groups of natives, and moving waiters. The stars were as brilliant in the depths of night, as immovable, as aloof, as if all strivings and tragedies were old. Down beneath in the shadows and the dim light, the pavement appeared like the bottom of a great chasm. I climbed to the balustrade of the balcony, stood on the broad top, hoped that the concrete of the dead Hakim's balcony was sound, and with all my strength leaped.

My foot slipped even as I launched myself forward. I seemed in flight, uncertainty and peril for a lifetime, and then fell short. I had a flashing nightmare of imagination in which I pictured my mangled body on the pavement far below, felt my fingers come in contact with the ornate scroll-work of manufactured stone, clung as none save the despairing can cling, and swung there for a moment in agony. Then with the strength of terror I lifted myself slowly and cautiously upward, fearing meanwhile that the concrete would give, got a knee to a ledge, shifted my hold to the top, pulled and fell into safety.

Weak and trembling, I jerked the jealousies aside and stepped into the room that smelled of stale wine and hot, flowing blood—that reeked in its silence of robbery, combat and death. And all the time there ran through my mind that one interruption of the early evening, the half-discerned quickness of the Punjabi's hand, the knowledge that to men of the East sleight-of-hand is not acquired, but a natural trait. I was certain that the interruption had been calculated, and in that quick diversion he had substituted the imitation purchased in Amsterdam by the Russians for the real Samarkand. I was certain that, had not the

Syrian almost accidentally discovered the substitution, the Punjabi and his supposed servant would have departed in peace, and that when Hakim came to the rendezvous on the following day he would have found that he too had been robbed, even as he had betrayed and robbed the Japanese.

I paid no heed to anything but the Punjabi. He lay as he had fallen, and kneeling beside him, I quickly felt over his body. I found the stone almost over his stilled heart, and had not the Sudanese struck upward and sidewise, it might have saved his life, at least momentarily. The stone was damp and smeared, but I had no more than faint repulsion, and no sympathy, as I straightened up, knowing that once again I held the Samarkand in my hands.

LOOKING back on it now I have a mental picture of myself standing there beside the table on which, in mocking travesty, stood two glasses of unspilled wine, a bowl of roses, an ice bucket with the neck of a bottle protruding, while at my feet the floor was littered with still forms, streaked with blood that still rivuleted sluggishly across white tiles, or dyed still deeper the colors of a huge rug, a broken, bespattered tabouret, a slender curved knife, a tarboosh that had been crushed by trampling feet, and the flowing ends of a Punjabi turban that had been torn loose in a death struggle. I switched off the lights, quietly opened the hall door and listened, then shrank back.

The hallway below resounded with the chatter of a *banwab* who had returned to his post from the corner, was preparing his couch, and discussing his losses at tric-trac with some of his fellows. Escape in that direction was cut off. I closed the door softly and sought the rear of the apartment, turning on lights as I went. There was a hall door leading presumably to a servants' staircase in the rear; but it had been locked and I had no key. I tried vainly to force it and could not. I went to a window and stared downward into a void three stories deep and hopeless. There was no possibility of escape save by risking again that terrifying leap from balcony to balcony which in my previous performance had so nearly cost me my life.

Again I returned to the death room. Turning off the lights, I slipped out to the balcony, letting the jealousies fall softly lest they make a noise, a needless precau-

CHAPTER IX

tion. Had I hesitated, I doubt if I could have dared the leap; but a sudden reckless desperation nerved me, and without taking time to think I stood upright and sprang. This time there was no slip, scarcely time for fear, and then a surge of exultation as I struck the top of the balustrade and by momentum was carried across it and fell sprawling in safety. I clapped my hand to my pocket. The Samarkand was still there, as if now it had sated itself with tragedy, and would give its malign influence rest.

I crawled into my room on my bruised hands and knees, then calmed myself, got up, and drew both shades and jalousies before turning on my lights. I threw off my coat and vest and with deliberate care and pains refilled the hole through the wall until confident that nothing less than close scrutiny could disclose that it had ever been made. I rehung the tapestry on my side, swept the floor lest dust betray me, replaced the table in the center of the room, polished its surface to remove telltale marks, made a last-minute inspection of everything, then turned off the lights and passed in stocking feet out through the back entrance and locked it behind me.

The rear hallway was open, silent, unguarded, and noiselessly I passed out through the archway into the sands of the back vacancies. Keeping to the darker shadows I came out into a main street, crossed it behind the silent, abandoned Stadium, made a wide detour and gained my hotel. The *banavab* was talking with a *ghafir* on the corner and I slipped in unobserved and within a few minutes was in my own room.

I couldn't resist the temptation to again study that which I took from my pocket. It seemed a thing of incomparable beauty and innocence, and I carefully cleansed and restored it to its original case. I washed my hands quietly lest the noise of splashing water be overheard, so frivolously cautious does one who has a guilty secret become, then went to bed. But there, in at least temporary safety, came the change from physical exertions to the terrifying conjectures of imagination, and until dawn swept blazing upward across the desert sands I tumbled, wide-eyed and restless, apprehending many dangers, conceiving the possibility of overlooked details that would fasten upon me participation in the night's murders.

I MUST have fallen into a sleep of utter physical and mental exhaustion, for I was dimly aware that for what seemed ages some one had been battering on my door to arouse me, the morning sun was blazing, hot and white, through the crevices of my blinds, and an Arabic voice was calling patiently, but insistently: "The Efendi is wanted to answer his telephone."

I turned over and caught the phone from the stand and heard a voice that in hasty and slithering English said: "It is I, Takiyamo. He is going. I am at the railway station. I followed him, and— Shall I follow on train and—"

"No, no, no," I replied, as my dazed wits filled in the gaps. "Let him go. Come here to the hotel. Take a taxi. Come at once."

It is not a long journey from the station in Cairo to the comfortable hotel of Monsieur Arni, but I was bathed, shaved and dressed, and drinking my coffee when Takiyamo, hollow-eyed from loss of sleep, appeared.

"I have gained nothing. Nothing!" he declaimed in utter despair, in English, and then, breaking into the more convenient French tongue: "I watched as you told me to—that house across the street. Men came. Many of them. They went up, they came not back. Save one who ran—and I knew him for one of the Russians. I followed him, running, and so we went for all the miles until he came to a house in front of that Garden called Ezbekiyeh where he went. Still I watched and saw shadows on the blinds, then when morning came so did he, and with suitcases, and hailed him a cab and—I have tried to do all you told me to do and—I have no jewel! I have failed! I have not helped you—I who so wished to help and prove that I am not thief and bad Japanese boy—but student who did bad, and—"

His despair was not without pathos; his sincerity obvious; his fidelity palpable.

I slowly poured more coffee, buttered another roll.

"Well," I said, "it can't be helped, Takiyamo. You did your best and—I have no complaint. Nor have I censure. We can't always do as we would. I think you did all you could and I am grateful, so don't worry."

He said something which I couldn't understand, in his native tongue, threatened

an exhibition of emotion, and then was of the Orient again, stolid, immobile, waiting. I had time to consider my own attitude.

"Takiyamo," I said, "I've decided to give it up. It's hopeless. We can't get the Samarkand. If that Russian has it, it is gone. I am through chasing it. We will go back to America. That is, unless you would rather go to Japan."

"To Japan?" he said, wistfully. And then, after a moment's thought, "But can I not go back to America with you? I would be student—as I was—just back where I was—your servant—and begin again."

"As you wish," I said, somewhat touched by this proof of loyalty. If the poor devil had it in him to start a career anew, who was I to hinder him? Perhaps that lump which I felt slung against my breast made me magnanimous. If so the influence of the Samarkand is not always malign. At any rate I never regretted the magnanimity.

HELIOPOLIS had its gruesome sensation, its flow of talk, its mystery, its buzzing of wonderment and speculation in the bazaars. Its police fussed and investigated, gave hopeful statements, promises of solution, and that was all. They never questioned me. Suspicion was never attached to the neighboring apartments. It was finally surmised that for some unknown reason a feud had taken place with deadly results, and that no robbery was involved inasmuch as in Hakim's desk was found a packet of money and some jewels, his stock in trade. It became eventually known that the Maharajah denied all knowledge of the Punjabi and—that was all.

The great jewel is publicly known to have been in the collection of Mr. Wakefield when he died, was sold by his niece to a great Eastern potentate, and is now the flaming center of an Indian regalia. No one ever questioned his title to it. It was supposed to have been purchased abroad through agents of the Soviet. It paid its duty in America, had its new epoch of notoriety, and perhaps bides its time. For me it brought all that I require in the way of retirement and ease, for he was a gentleman of his word. Takiyamo is now a professor in Japan. But it was not until quite recently that I heard the solution of one inexplicable point. It came from the lips of Miss Wakefield, with whom, for

no reason that seems logical to me, I am on somewhat intimate terms. That also I owe to that stone which is supposed to be endowed with nothing but evil.

"I can tell you something you don't know, Mr. Wise-Man," she said banteringly, one day.

"Yes? Let's hear it," I answered.

Most unexpected was her reply:

"Since I have come to know you so well, and somewhat like you, and esteem you as a friend, I've always felt guilty about something. Had a burden on my chest. Felt like confession. It's about the loss of the Samarkand."

I gasped, recalling those troublous, those ultimately tragic days, and she who never knew of the lives that it had cost went on as if retailing a curious jest:

"When my poor uncle first got hold of that thing, he went a trifle mad. Honestly, I was afraid for his sanity. He became so absorbed in possession, so fascinated by it, that I feared he would commit a folly. He used to sit in the night-time with it in front of him, as if hypnotized by its red glare. I found him staring at it several times. I hated it. I was sorry that it had ever been found. I wished it at the bottom of the deepest ocean. Then when he evolved that idea of sending you abroad with it to get a semblance of title, so that you could bring it back and he could pass the remainder of his life gloating over it, I rebelled. I was desperate. I thought of stealing it myself and throwing it in the river, but couldn't find a way. It was I who told Takiyamo about it, and what was to be done with it, and it was I who gave Takiyamo the money to follow you, to steal it, and make away with it. It was I who suggested the substitution of a faked stone. Money didn't enter into it as far as I was concerned. I suppose it never entered into my mind what failure meant to you. You see, I didn't know you so well then and I didn't understand and—I didn't care—then."

Takiyamo had never betrayed her! He hadn't told me all despite his gratitude for what I had eventually done for him. Her last words lingered in my mind: "I didn't care—then!" Why that hesitation before the qualifying "Then"?

I suddenly lifted my eyes from their abstracted stare and caught hers.

"Do you now?" I asked.

She did!

The Sport of Kings provides, in this interesting narrative, the sort of story that all too seldom comes true.



Star Baby

By **George L. King**

NEW Orleans, during the winter racing season, is a pretty lively locality, all in all. Everything is wide open. Hotels and boarding-houses and restaurants, both first and second class, do a land-office business. For three months the city doesn't sleep a wink. At any corresponding hour, within those ninety days, Canal and St. Charles rivals Broadway and Forty-second Street, in crowds, clothes and diamonds. The wife and I were down there on sort of a combination business trip and delayed honeymoon.

Naturally we drifted out to the track occasionally. Who wouldn't? We've all got a little sporting blood in our veins. And speaking of myself, I like to see the horses run. Not only that, but I like to put a small bet down occasionally, just the same as any ordinary guy likes to put up

a few dimes on the world series. There isn't any harm in that. And it kind of gingers up the proceedings.

Of course with the wife it's different. She seldom makes a wager of any kind. In fact most women, although I don't claim to know them all, like to see a dollar's worth for every nickel they shell out, and the world knows that you don't find any bargains at the race-track.

But there are times when even the ladies take a tumble. Take for instance this memorial day out at the Fair Ground track. The wife fell for a pretty name. And you know we wouldn't fall for anything quite as stupid as that. Hunches and paddock tips and dope-sheets might take us over, but never a pretty name.

Anyway that's what started the fireworks—a pretty name. It was the seventh race.

The trumpet had done its work. The horses were parading out from the paddock onto the track and then down past the grandstand for the review.

The wife turns to me and says, "Which is Star Baby, dear?"

Well, Star Baby was a new one to me and I had to consult the program. Yes, there she was, Number 3, colors white and purple. I pointed her out to the Missus. She was fourth in line—number three in back of the lead pony.

Then the wife springs surprise Number One:

"I just think I'll bet ten dollars on Star Baby," was the way she put it.

NOW what is the use of spoiling anybody's little party? I didn't have the heart to tell her that Star Baby was a rank outsider in that gathering. And then again it was only going to cost me a ten spot. So I just smiled and encouraged her all I could.

Of course I knew that it was the stupid name that appealed to her and nothing else; for what the wife doesn't know about horses would fill a large book. She probably knows that some of them have four legs and that they are generally found in front of a milk-wagon, but that at best is the limit of her knowledge about that particular quadruped. But then, as I said before, we were off on sort of a honeymoon, and a feller's got to put up with a whole lot on a jaunt like that. So I submitted, not only peaceably but with a smile, and kept what opinions I had to myself. In fact I started to peel a tenner off the bank-roll and do the honors right then and there. I say started, and that's as far as I got; for at that very moment the Missus decided to spring surprise Number Two:

"Dear," she says in all seriousness, "I want to bet my own money."

Can you beat that? The wife wanted to bet her own dough. And take it from me when a woman digs up enough courage to risk ten bucks of her own money on a horse-race it's time to quit talking and sit tight. I did.

Well, by the time the boss gets the bill out of her trick bag, the horses were being jockeyed into their positions at the post. Time was getting short and it would take some mighty tall going to get down to the betting ring in time to lay a wager. Which tells you that I didn't make the transfer of that bill from the wife's hand to mine

a ceremonious affair. Mine was a hurried exit.

I made that hundred yards in about eight flat, and then just made the betting ring in time. For just as I handed the wife's donation to my friend the bookmaker the caller shouted: "Jack Robinson!" The race was on.

And believe me I thought that wager nothing less than a donation. So did the bookmaker, if that silly grin on his face meant anything.

"Star Baby on the nose, Mr. King?" was all he said. He knew my name; for I had been a good customer, in a small way, on several occasions.

To that I nodded. On the nose meant to win. And as I made my departure I gave his slate the once-over. Star Baby's price was twenty, eight and four. Twenty to one to win.

WELL, I made no attempt to get back in the grandstand. I had to be satisfied to watch the race from the lawn or miss it altogether. I pushed up close to the rail and craned my neck.

Star Baby had got off to a good start. She was third, a short length behind the leaders who were running neck and neck. Her jockey's purple jacket, spotted with big white polka dots, was easy to follow. They passed the quarter—the half. Star Baby still held third place and was receiving a beautiful ride. Her jockey was way up on her withers, putting his weight where it would ride the easiest.

I waited for them to hit the turn. My eyes were on the horses in front. Would the one on the inside bear out? I knew that if he did he would carry his running mate with him and give Star Baby a chance to come through on the rail.

And that's just what happened. The leaders swung wide. Star Baby's jockey was on the alert and didn't throw that golden opportunity away. He squeezed his mount through the opening, hugging the rail like a porous plaster, and saved every inch of ground possible. And coming into the stretch Star Baby was leading by at least two good lengths and fighting for her head.

Horses were scattered from rail to rail. Whips were being used freely. But not on the horse that was carrying the wife's dough. She was getting one of the prettiest hand rides you ever laid your eyes on. Just once, as they thundered down the

stretch, did the peak of that white cap face her flanks, and then, I'll bet the face underneath was flooded with smiles. That boy knew that he had the race won. And he didn't make any mistake. They won by open daylight.

That was the last race on the afternoon's program and everybody started crowding toward the exits. I had the choice of getting in line and waiting my turn to cash in or collecting later in the evening. Johnie Shaw always paid off in the evenings as well as out to the track and I knew where I could find him. I decided to hunt up the wife and cash in later.

But as far as the hunting for the wife was concerned it wasn't necessary. I found her right at my elbow. She had spotted me from the grandstand.

"Wasn't Star Baby a darling! How much do I win?" That was the greeting I received, and it came out all in one breath.

And when I told her that she had won two hundred dollars her face lit up like the Tower of Jewels. You'd a thought she had just fell heir to the U. S. Mint. And talk! Boy, she talked Star Baby and Star Baby all the way back to the hotel! I didn't get a chance to get a word in edgewise. Yes, of course she was a little put out about not getting her money right away. All women are that way.

ANYWAY, that evening when the better half was dressing for dinner, I took a run over to the St. Charles. That was her suggestion, of course. She said that I would have plenty of time to dress and shave for dinner when I got back.

It didn't take me long to find my man. He was right in his familiar spot, just outside of the barber shop.

"Pretty lucky today, Mr. King," he said as he surrendered a small brown envelope, sealed, with my name written across the corner.

"Not me—the wife," I told him. And I could see that he was a little bit puzzled. I didn't know why at the time, but I did later.

Thirty-five or forty minutes would cover the time I was away from the hotel. I intended to go right up to the room and started across the lobby to the elevator. But I didn't get there because the manager called to me from behind the desk:

"Mr. King—please."

I stepped right over and he motioned

me to come around in back. From there he ushered me into his private office. I could tell by the expression on his face that he was worried.

I guessed right. Something was wrong. A young girl, whom I recognized as being a maid on our floor, was seated over near the manager's flat-topped desk. It was very evident that she had been crying. Her face was tear-stained and sadly in need of repair.

"Mr. King," said the manager as soon as I was seated, "your wife reports that a hundred-dollar bill was taken from her purse while she was bathing. She telephoned down to me a few minutes ago and said that she had heard some one enter the room and leave again. Not being dressed she couldn't reënter the bedroom until the intruder had left. This girl," the manager continued after a short pause, his head turned slightly in her direction, "admits that she was the one that entered the room, but claims that it was on duty—to leave fresh towels. That's the situation. Can you throw any light on the matter?"

At that particular moment, I couldn't. I felt sorry for the girl. She didn't look like a thief and she certainly didn't act like one. But then again my wife wouldn't report a loss that wasn't genuine. I didn't know what to say.

"No, I can't," was the best answer I could give him.

For about a moment he didn't say a word. And when he did finally speak his voice showed only too plainly that he was very much annoyed over the affair, and more worried than he cared to show.

"Then allow me to handle this," he said eagerly, "and please tell Mrs. King that the hotel will be only too glad to reimburse her for the loss. I would much prefer to have this unfortunate affair remain quiet."

I SAW the point and assured him that nothing would be said about it. Neither the wife or I cared to make any scandal and I told him so plainly.

He was greatly relieved—I could see that. And when I asked him to go easy with the girl, and allow her to go home until the theft was investigated more thoroughly, he readily assented. It was easy to see that her arrest was something that he wished to avoid, if possible.

Well, of course the wife was pretty much upset. I told her what the manager had said but that didn't seem to do much good.

Her day was ruined, that's all there was to it.

She didn't want to go to dinner—a show—or do anything else. So I just placed the envelope with her day's winnings on her dresser and went in for a shower and a shave, thinking perhaps that after she had shed a few more tears and investigated that envelope that she would feel better and perhaps change her mind about spending the evening without any supper or entertainment.

I had taken my shower and was in the midst of a shave when I heard a thump in the bedroom. I rushed in. I didn't know what had happened. I must have been a fine looking sight in my B V D's, one side of my face lathered, the other side clean, and a murderous-looking razor in my hand.

And it wasn't my wife's position on the floor that left me standing there like a gawk. It was what I saw scattered about the floor: bills and bills and more bills—hundreds, fifties and twenties. The Missus was sitting right in the middle of them, laughing and crying at the same time.

Now, I don't claim to hold the world's championship as a quick thinker, but I saw the joker in that little comedy—pronto. Star Baby had carried a hundred dollars on her back for the wife—not ten. The wife hadn't lost a hundred dollars at all, but instead Miss Lady Luck had dropped a cool two thousand in her lap. In her haste to get that bill out of her pocket-book out at the track she had made a mistake. She blundered and gave me a hundred-dollar note and that blunder netted her a cool two thousand. Can you beat that?

And me like a fool—or was I a fool?—never looked at it, never thought of unfolding it. But am I to blame? Does a woman make such mistakes—with her own money—very often? She doesn't. Anyway, getting back to the money on the floor: I helped her pick it up. Yes, it tallied just an even twenty-one hundred.

And that's about all. But I might add that the maid still remains on the job—at least she was there when we left—and the Missus presented her with a nice new hundred-dollar bill the day following all the excitement. Furthermore, when anyone tells me you can't beat the races I refer them to the head of the house. The wife is still a two-thousand-dollar winner—just the same as she was some seven years ago.

The Silver Coin

By **A. Hope Wheeler**

WHEN you go talking about luck, most people give you the horse-laugh. If your tale offers the opportunity, they will moralize and tell you it pays to do the right thing. "Honesty is the best policy," and a lot of other sermon stuff. But down deep in his heart, everybody believes more or less in luck. I am not a preacher, so you may be the judge.

It was my lot to belong to that vast army of young Americans who, several years after the Armistice was signed, received an honorable discharge from the United States Army and a few dollars in small change, and were turned loose on the world without trade, occupation or visible means of support.

The money did not last long, and the discharge didn't seem specially useful in getting a job. I was one of the thousands who drifted from city to city and town to town when unemployment was at its worst.

One bright summer morning I dropped off a freight-train in New Orleans. My arrival in this Southern metropolis was just about like it had been in a hundred other towns and cities in this land of the free and home of the brave. My wardrobe aside from what I was making use of at the time consisted of a coat, towel, safety razor and



Any such thing as luck in Business? Well, perhaps luck was concerned with Mr. Wheeler's success, and then again—perhaps you'll write your own answer?

the small remains of a cake of soap. My capital was the entire sum of one thin dime. I did not look like an ordinary bum, but of course I did not look prosperous.

My first act, as soon as I had made sure the cops were not on the lookout for vags, was to invest my capital in a doughnut and cup of coffee. Then I took up the day's routine work—set out looking for a job. My experience was the same as it had been on hundreds of other days, fruitless. After nightfall I located a park which it seemed the authorities were allowing the jobless to use as sleeping quarters, and there made my bed on the soft side of an iron seat.

The next day was like the last, and many others. When the long hot afternoon was nearly gone, something round and shiny caught my eye on the sidewalk before me. I stooped and picked it up. It was nothing less than a perfectly good new United States silver half-dollar!

IF you never were flat broke, utterly homeless, friendless and hungry in a strange town, and by sheer luck found a half-dollar, there is no use for me to try to describe my feelings to you. You wouldn't understand.

Naturally I headed for the first cheap

restaurant and ordered all the good solid grub the half-dollar would buy, taking no thought of the morrow, for I was half-starved.

As I laid my coin on the counter to pay for my meal, I received a rousing slap on the back and heard the jovial greeting:

"Why, hello, Bill! Where the blazes you been keepin' yourself?"

I looked around and gazed into the face of a perfect stranger, as well as I could remember; but the boys of the road answer to all names known, so I replied:

"I'm mighty glad to see you, but you've got me. Where did we ever meet before?"

"Don't you remember me?" He described a place and time utterly foreign to any experience I could recall.

"I think you have me wrong. I've been almost everywhere on this continent, but that is one place I know I've never been. I'm mighty pleased to meet you just the same."

"Well, it's all my mistake, and that meal is on me. Cashier, take out for his too."

My protests were useless, so I put my half-dollar back in my pocket. We chatted for a while and he told me about a certain oil company that was putting on men. As we parted I felt much encouraged, so much that I decided to spend half of my

money for a cot in a cheap hotel, and for once not sleep with the bums in the park.

The landlady was a jolly old soul, built on generous proportions. As I registered, she regarded me with a kindly eye.

"You look like a man looking for work," she greeted.

"Yes, that's my main occupation," I replied.

"Well, if you'd like to make your room and a big breakfast in the morning, I'll give you a little job."

Needless to say, I accepted her offer. The job was cleaning up and doing minor repairs. For the service I got a dandy room, bath, and a chance to clean up and shave. The breakfast was about the best a man ever put inside himself.

My half-dollar still rested in my worn-out wallet, and I had begun to feel as if it were some kind of a charm bringing me luck.

MOST of the forenoon was spent before I thought of the oil company, and the first thing I learned about it was that it was sixteen miles away, quite a long walk. Yet nothing could induce me to break and spend a part of my charmed coin for carfare, so I set out on the long journey.

I have made many long hot walks in my life, but I believe that one, or the part I made of it, was the worst I ever experienced. When I had covered about half the distance, it seemed I could not go a step farther. Unable to do otherwise, I took a street-car and handed the conductor my coin to pay my fare. Affecting carelessness, as if I had plenty of money, I dropped the change into my pocket with a sinking heart. Somehow I could not shake off the superstitious feeling that my recent good luck had left me forever.

My experience at the oil company seemed to confirm my fears. I failed to get a job, even an encouraging interview. Walking back to town was impossible, so I would take a car. I was in a hurry to spend the rest of my money, anyway. What had it done for me, except to make me build false hopes?

As I waited for the car, a heavy truck came to a stop by me and the driver yelled:

"Come on, old buddy, hop up and get a ride. The street-car company don't need your money!"

I was glad to comply. Perhaps my luck hadn't changed, after all, and I put aside

my foolish idea about the charmed coin. It was gone, anyway. Why think about it? I headed for my friendly hotel again, resolved to spend the rest of it for food and lodging. The buxom landlady greeted me with a jolly smile and banter:

"Why, you back again? Had an idea you'd land a job. Well, I can use you again tonight for room and feed. What you say?"

I accepted but refused to be encouraged. What was the use? Luck was against me. The fight in me was all gone. I had given up many times before, but now I was completely licked.

The next morning, feeling refreshed after a good night's rest and plenty of wholesome food, I started out as usual, job-hunting. I resolved not to go back to the hotel. I appreciated the landlady's kindness, but to me it was just plain charity. Not that it was anything new for me to accept charity. But for some unknown reason I could not accept favors from this kindly old lady in the guise of employment. I would get as far away from the hotel as possible and sleep on park benches and eat doughnuts and coffee as long as my forty cents held out.

I had not thought of my change since I had broken my charmed coin. It was still loose in my pocket. I had better put it in my wallet so as not to lose any of the precious nickels and dimes. I emptied my pocket and began counting the worn, tarnished coins. One dime, one nickel—and what was that other? It ought to be a silver quarter, but it wasn't. Looked like a penny, only a little too big, also too heavy, and pretty badly worn. What did it say? Surely not five dollars!

Holy Moses! That is just what it did say, and that is just what it was, a five-dollar gold-piece! I could live a week on that. Talk about luck! Wasn't that li'l ol' silver half-dollar the luck, though?

So my plans began. I would get me a cheap room, eat fairly good meals, and by careful economy get by for several days.

I walked on, block after block, asking here and there for a job, all the time making my plans. I was richer than I had been for ages.

ALL of a sudden, without apparent reason, I stopped dead still in my tracks. Something had hit me in the head. I don't mean a brick or a piece of iron, or anything like that, but something on the in-

side of my head, or inside of me somewhere else.

That five dollars wasn't mine! That was the first time any such thought had been in my mind since I had got out of the army, or since I couldn't tell when. Then conflicting thoughts began working in my mind. My brain was all in a whirl. I couldn't seem to make head nor tail of anything, somehow.

Why wasn't it mine? Didn't that conductor give it to me? Certainly it was a mistake in making change, but don't we all have to pay for our mistakes? Anyway, it was a soulless corporation. Hadn't the corporations been robbing the people for centuries? Nobody but a fool would think of taking it back. Dispel such foolish thoughts!

But I could not dispel the thought. Something was working inside of me that had been idle for a long time. Somehow, money did not seem to amount to very much to me. In fact, it never had. I had always been just about as well off broke as I was flush. But I felt myself thinking and doing things that I could not understand. I was well downtown, and traffic was pretty heavy. I stopped at a corner where the car-lines branched off in all directions. There was a little boothlike house at one side. The man in the booth was some kind of an official, a dispatcher or something. I addressed him:

"Will you please tell me whom to see in case the street-car conductor gives you the wrong change?"

"What's that? The wrong change? Say, what you talking about? If you got too much, see me. If you didn't get enough, don't see anybody."

HE was joking with me; yet I was thoroughly serious. He probably thought I was joking.

"Yes," I replied. "One of your men gave me too much change yesterday."

"And you want to return it?"

"Yes."

"You poor boy! Were you shell-shocked in France?"

"I don't know whether it was shell-shock or not, but I've just come to realize that there's been something the matter with me."

"Well, there's something dreadful the matter with you now. I'd advise you to see a good doctor right away."

Strange to say, his jocular manner didn't ease my conscience. He was trying to

make it clear to me that I should keep the change, but I could not make myself see it that way.

I walked on and on, without purpose, till the afternoon was well spent. Then I happened to notice a sign on a large office building: "General Offices, Electric Railway Company."

I WAS very ill at ease and anxious to get it over, for I had a deep feeling that I had to return that money. I entered the office and asked at the information desk. Nobody seemed to know where to direct me on such an errand, so at last I was ushered into the office of the manager of transportation.

I never was so uncomfortable in all my life so I lost no time. Without even sitting, at his invitation, I laid the gold coin on his desk and explained:

"One of your conductors gave me this by mistake yesterday. I have come to return it."

Turning, I started for the door.

"Wait a minute! Tell us more about it," he called.

"That's all there is to tell, sir. He just gave it to me by mistake, and that's all there is to it."

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. There may be a lot more to it. Who are you and where are you working?"

"I'm not anybody—just a bum. I'm not working anywhere."

Again I started to leave. He called me back and made me sit down. Then he began to ask about my past history and experience. Somehow he seemed to turn my soul inside out and examine everything there was in it, or ever had been. And somehow, for the first time in my life, I was willing to unload myself to a fellow-being. When we left his office, it was long past closing time, and I had a job that I never asked for.

My success in the years that followed with the company, a soulless corporation with branches all over the country, is just like the success of hundreds of other young men who have been put on the right track by somebody who understood, and have made good. Nobody is specially interested in that.

But what brought it all about? Who dropped the shiny something on the sidewalk that day? Did it have a charm to change a human life, or was it just the luck of the Silver Coin?

Humor doesn't usually come out of North Russia; but in this joyous story certain American soldiers were concerned; and what is more, they were on the way home!



The Lifted WIG

By **Daniel Howard Steele**

THE old tramp steamer *Dosvidanya*, crowded to the rails with lumber, leather, mules and a couple of gay battalions of American troops, homeward bound—and full of hell—from the North Russian front, leaned against the wharf at Kola, on the Murman Coast, to discharge the mules.

In the dining saloon, where officers, Y men and other noncombatants ate with second lieutenants and ship's officers, the lid had blown off and everyone was carrying on as only troops who have just left behind the scenes of a hard campaign can behave—with wild hilarity. The table to our left was extremely fortunate in having, as the butt of their comedy, a mild-eyed bird who had promised to marry the comely, passionate, go-getting widow of some defunct Russki trombone-player. The lady was to meet him at the boat, where he had arranged for her passage home with him. She did—accompanied by three previously

unannounced, squalling young trombonists. The prospective other half of this international match dived down an after hatchway, and they only restrained him from burrowing to a bituminous grave at the bottom of a coal-bunker by assuring him that his betrothed had been persuaded to remain in "free Russia."

At our table the flow of wit was a little less obvious. At its head, by virtue of habit, his fatherly impulses and lack of competition for the place, presided Chaplain Percy Brompton, his mannerisms and poses of smug self-assurance so effective with his civilian flock hidden, to some extent, by the suit of Uncle Sam's clothes he was obliged to wear, on his shoulder the unmistakable insignia of Lieutenant of Divinity. At his left, repeating, reinforcing, agreeing with Chaplain Percy's remarks, let me introduce Peter Welch, who had been helping the Y. M. C. A. save the world for democracy. Across from Peter and, some

of us thought, completely nullifying Peter's influence for good, Bud Verrall improved every lull in the conversation, from consommé to coffee, by telling off-color stories, to the painful embarrassment of Percy and Peter. I sat next to Bud. And along the table on both sides stretched the audience to Bud's recitations—often in distressingly bad taste—and Percy's reproving come-backs.

"Did you ever hear the story," Bud let out, "of the traveling man who went to the hotel and—"

This was too much for Percy. He arose, a deep red blossoming around his ears and shading off into the bricky color of his hair. (He could have never escaped the nickname "Red" if his real name had been other than Percy.) Peter, lacking the ability to blush, but with his friend in spirit, followed.

After a minute Jerry Colby, a tall, dignified, good-looking chap, who might have doubled for John Barrymore, addressed the table:

"Did any of you men ever notice anything peculiar about the chaplain's hair?"

"No—except the color."

"Well, he wears a wig—a toupee."

"The devil you say!"

"And it just occurred to me that it might be funny to see how he looks without it. . . . I'll bet five pounds that nobody has nerve enough to steal it." (We were still being paid in rubles, marks, pounds, trading-stamps, cigar coupons, or what have you?) I'll do better than that. . . . I'll give five pounds to anybody that gets it. Let's live on this boat-ride a bit."

After supper as I stood on deck, sizing up the belles of Kola, who had come down to see the *Dosvidanya*,—there was no chance of getting shore-leave,—Hank Riley came up to me and said:

"Listen! I don't know any easier way of earning twenty-five bucks than by getting that wig for Jerry Colby. Do you?"

"Sounds easy," I allowed. "Got any ideas?"

He had. Plenty.

AS the midnight sun was throwing shadows on the opposite side of the ship, Hank and I sneaked unobserved along the companionway to the cabin which Percy shared with Peter and Doc Nicholls. We had taken Doc into our confidence so he would not give us away when he saw his quarters invaded. But we would have

to dodge Peter. We knew how eager he would be to rise in righteous wrath and smite the Philistines with a chair or pitcher or part of the ship in defense of Percy's dignity. He was a big, lusty bird who could chin himself with one hand—the result, as he put it, of total abstinence—and, while Hank and I could probably have handled him, we wanted to do a smooth job, and didn't care to wake up the whole army—particularly since the colonel's cabin adjoined theirs.

Fortunately, the door to their cabin stood ajar. We were familiar with its arrangement: a single berth, occupied by Peter, on the outboard side, under a large port-hole; two berths across from it, Percy in the top one, Doc in the lower. Our approach along the uncarpeted companionway made a startling racket, and we waited a little outside their door to listen. Not a sound.

Smoothly as a second-story worker—I don't know what his prewar occupation was—Hank eased the cabin door inward. It was a squeakless door, an impartial door.

We first saw—or rather, heard—the doughty Y man, Peter, lying on his side, pounding his ear—a faint, nasal hum in a minor key issuing from some part of his face. Hank moved farther into the cabin. I entered after him, leaving the door open.

Hanging on a hook at the door was Doc's heavy sheepskin coat. My job was to attend to Peter while Hank did his stuff. I grabbed the coat, and spreading it out like a curtain, stood in front of Peter, blocking his view from the upper berth where Percy slept. I glanced over my shoulder at Hank.

Percy, in retiring, had modestly drawn the curtains across his bunk. That was a complication! What if he wore a nightcap! In the lower berth I saw Doc Nicholls slowly open one eye; then his face contorted in his effort to keep from laughing. Hank reached out his right hand and gingerly slid back the curtain a foot or two from the head, exposing Percy's dome, bare of nightcap—or wig, which hung neatly from a hook at the back of the bunk. His face was toward us—the very picture of placid contentment. Have you ever seen a heifer asleep—a Hereford heifer with a clear conscience? His fat lower lip had dropped away from its mate, exposing a humorless, gold-toothed smile. The covers were tucked snugly around his neck. His sleep was noiseless. We hoped it was sound.

Hank was too deliberate to suit me; I was getting nervous and anxious to finish this bit of burglary. Hank turned to me, carelessly.

"Too good to be true!" he chuckled coolly.

"Hurry!" I whispered.

Peter grunted in his sleep, rolling over onto his back. No time to lose. All was calm in the cabin—the calm before a squall. Hank leaned over Percy; his left hand shot out, then jerked back, clutching what looked like the business end of a mop. "*Ee-eeek!*" In his haste Hank had let his booty touch Percy's face, and you'd have thought, from the squawk Percy let out, that the old *Dosvidanya* had been torpedoed. I was too busy myself from that moment to see him slide the curtain shut in Percy's face.

Percy's signs of distress brought Peter out of his slumbers with a jolt. His eyes popped open, and he started to sit up. But while he was still dopy from sleep, I did a Strangler Lewis on him, smothering his yowls under the heavy coat. Leaving him flopping like a fish in a net, I made an all-American for the door. Hank had made his get-away and had disappeared when I burst into the aisle. The noise of a commotion and, I thought, unseemly language, reached me from the cabin, but not for long. I fled along the companionway, cut across the deck amidships, ducked into my berth with all my clothes on and, pulling up the covers, pretended sleep. Hank, I knew, was playing possum in his own bunk.

AT the stairway forward, lanky Sam Evans was arguing with a British naval officer about the surprise that the United States had pulled off for her boys when they came home—Prohibition. The Britisher's remarks began to assume a more or less personal character; and Evans, unwilling to accept any of the responsibility for what the dry vote had slipped over on the country when two million thirsty votes were in France, burst out:

"Well, don't blame me! I didn't do it!"

At that moment, just in time to hear Evans' last four words, "I didn't do it," Percy's champion, Peter, clad in the sheepskin coat, his eyes blazing, his hair on end, came clumping up to them in the heavy shoes he had put on as slippers, confident that Evans referred to the stolen wig. He seized him by the arm and shook him crazily.

"Who did, then?" he demanded. "Who could have done it but you?"

"What the hell you talkin' about?" Evans shouted, jerking away from him. "You're off your nut! Who did what?"

Peter, seeing that he had made a mistake, stammered:

"Er—well, somebody stole the chaplain's toupee. . . . You're sure you didn't see them?"

The Englishman spoke up: "We've been standing here for a quarter of an hour and haven't seen a bally soul. Lifted the padre's wig, did they? Ho-ho-ho! No, we didn't see 'em. Ho-ho-ho! But I'd 'ave given a quid for the chance."

PETER, baffled, stamped angrily away and soon the old steamer, from stem to stern, from keel to crow's-nest, slept, motionless, soundless, unconscious—unless it be that Percy tossed an anxious head.

At breakfast next morning, with the entire table assembled, discussing the lifted wig and the probabilities that he would stay under cover until it was recovered, Percy appeared. He smiled benignly as usual, at one and all, said "Good morning, men," and took his seat. Jerry Colby, who had been hiding under the mask of dignity his anticipation of getting five pounds' worth of amusement out of the wigless Percy, gulped in astonishment. He knew they would be treated to the spectacle; he had the chaplain's wig in his pocket. Hank and I glanced at one another in consternation, recognizing failure. We had been certain the performance would take place; we had Colby's five pounds in hand. The group at the table gasped, then roared with laughter. But not at Percy: Hank and I felt like a couple of Kerenski rubles. We would have sold out cheaper than that. We were dumfounded. Still, we had to hand it to Percy.

For instead of greeting the world from under a bare and shining poll, he seemed conscious of nothing altered in his facial equipment. Instead of shrinking beneath a skull naked of all but freckles, he beamed at us from below the eaves of a well-thatched roof, perhaps a trifle more auburn than usual, and with its curl over the right temple in a somewhat tighter kink, but still, an adequate bean-cover. To our profound chagrin, at that moment, with the laugh on us, we were desolated to learn that—

He had another wig!

By **Truman H.
Woodward**



The Wedding Ring

A Mystery of the Great War tellingly set forth.

SOLDIER philosophy in the World War was commonly stated: "If you're going to get it, why, you're going to get it." And the unspoken conclusion seemed to be: "Whether you keep your head down or not."

There was little Norton, for instance, tending telephone in an exposed position to No Man's Land. Just before the drive started, he called up his pal, Stuntz, who was answering phone half a mile farther back in the Argonne Forest. "What say, Stuntzy? Trade positions with me?"

"Nothing doing, Norton. You're too close to Heine to suit me."

An hour later the great offensive was under way. Norton in his dangerous location came through without a scratch. Stuntz, who had thought himself comparatively safe, died instantly when a bomb fragment broke his neck.

More striking yet was the Walton case. Tyler N. Walton had served for several weeks in dangerous positions as a member of the Intelligence Corps of the 28th Division. Lying unsheltered in No Man's Land ferreting out data concerning the enemy,—in swamps, in forests, in crumbling ruins, subjected equally to the shelling of both sides,—his was no enviable lot. At length, after much red tape, Walton secured a transfer to our battery, where he judged his work would be far less hazardous. He was killed within twenty-four hours after the transfer.

Was it mere coincidence, this weird tale which I now record?

AT Fresnes, in the Château Thierry salient, we were encamped a few kilometers back of the lines. Being off duty one morning, I set out for the canteen

with visions of buying sweet chocolate and canned peaches. Just as I was starting, I noticed one of our trucks with motor humming. Hobart Caswell, on K. P. duty that day, was putting a water-container in the truck.

"Going over to the canteen, Caswell?" I asked hopefully.

"Naw, just going after water," he replied grouchily; so, somewhat rebuffed and much disappointed, I started on foot for La Charnel.

An hour's trudging brought me to the canteen, and I took my place rather disconsolately at the end of the inevitable long line of waiting soldiers. A few minutes later I espied Hobart Caswell leaving the counter with his arms full of purchases. Resentment grew against him, as I realized that I might have been just as lucky, if he hadn't lied about leaving camp.

Two hours dragged by, and it was nearly mess-time. No soldier likes to miss his eats, but for the sake of the sweet chocolate I decided to forgo them. When twelve o'clock came, I was fourth man from the counter.

"Canteen closed until two o'clock," bawled the commissary sergeant.

I was not the only one who dropped a naughty word. I had walked four miles, stood in line two hours, missed my noon meal, had four miles still to walk, and nothing to show for it!

To me the maddening part was that it was all so unnecessary. If Caswell had only given me half a chance to ride in the truck! The farther I walked and the hungrier I became, the more I damned him. Up hill and down dale for a mile I used names that had never come to my lips before.

Then suddenly I came to myself.

"You're a fine specimen of an almost clergyman," I whispered in self-reproach. "Why don't you practice some of the charity you used to preach about?"

At once I determined not to be petty enough to hate my battery-mate. I even let a little sentence of prayer fly skyward that the Great Generalissimo on high would cast all hate out of me.

This isn't mere sentiment. I have to tell it because of what happened afterward.

In the weeks that followed, I never chanced to see Caswell to speak with him. We were in different platoons, with small likelihood of being thrown together.

Then came the memorable Argonne

drive. Our trench mortar fire was only a tiny part of a terrific barrage hitherto unparalleled in history.

When morning came, we saw the cost. Our third platoon had been practically annihilated by a chance shot which set off a small ammunition dump. Two craters in the forest earth, and all vegetation within a radius of thirty yards were swept bare by the innumerable hurtling fragments of nearly a hundred bombs. The leather vest which Sergeant Hannon wore at the time of the explosion was on the topmost limb of a forty-foot tree.

That afternoon we buried ten in one large grave, among them Bugler Stuntz, while a colored lad from the 92nd Division blew the "taps" which Stuntzy would never sound again.

Hobart Caswell alone from that ill-fated platoon could not be accounted for. The battery listed him as "missing in action." Then next day trace of him was found.

I WAS sound asleep after guard duty when the burial squad awoke me.

"We've found what's left of Hobart," they said. "There's no chaplain within miles. You went to a sky-pilot school. Couldn't you hold the burial service?"

"Yes," I answered simply, more awestruck than anything else.

So I stood by the wooden cross that marked the head of his grave and read the solemn words. Under the turf in a shelter-half was just a hand, identified by the wedding ring on the finger—all that was left of Hobart Caswell.

Now maybe it's only sentiment, but somehow as I gave the committal, I felt unutterably glad that weeks before I had forgiven the lad whom now I buried. Else my prayer for the good of his soul would have seemed all hypocrisy now.

Yet my story is not done! One year later I, who am anything but a spiritualist, attended a séance at the home of a friend in Detroit. The medium claimed she had a message for me.

"There comes in spirit form," said she in sepulchral tones, "a lad in khaki. I can't make him out very well, but I see distinctly a hand with a ring upon it. Do you know what that means?"

I shook my head, for I was too much moved to wish to converse in public.

"Well, anyway," she said, impatiently turning from me, "he wants you to tell his wife he's all right."

A former officer of the Canadian Mounted Police here vividly recounts the extraordinary Adventure that befell him and his dog in the "bush."

Jim

By

A. A. Strachan



I MUST confess that Jim did it under protest.

Jim was a regimental dog, and had no use for anyone who did not wear a red tunic. He had been brought up in the barracks and knew every bugle-call as well as any trooper of the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police. When the bugler went to the parade-ground, Jim punctiliously followed him, and while he sounded, the puppy squatted on his hind legs and imitated the calls to his own entire satisfaction. When the dinner bugle pealed across the square, Jim was always first at the mess-room door, and his day ended with Retreat as regularly as the sun went down.

So you can see that when I took my discharge from the service one April in the nineties and filed on a bush homestead some distance north of the North Saskatchewan River, it nearly broke Jim's heart. Fond as he was of me, I don't believe I could have persuaded him to follow me to the homestead if I had not brought my old regimental tunic along and worn it at intervals to satisfy his doggish mind. For weeks after we settled down he moped, only re-

viving at any slight indication that I might be going to take the trail out. Then such a tail-wagging, such agonized whines and yaps, such yanks at my trouser-legs, such coaxing running ahead on the trail and barked invitations to quit this foolishness and go back to where he considered we both belonged. But I was obdurate; and at last, finding that I had no intention of quitting, Jim became reconciled to exile. For a long time, though, he seemed to miss the sound of the bugle more than anything else; and each day, about the hours of Reveille and Retreat, poor Jim would squat on his stumpy tail and howl his heart out.

Except for Jim I was practically alone, my nearest neighbor being six miles away. I had chosen the bush country because I preferred to have wood and water about, and felt there were more ways in which I could make a living in such a district than there were on the prairie, where your homestead is a piece of dirt with a piece of sky on top that is too far away to keep you warm in winter.

I had been in the country for ten years and knew it as a member of the Northwest

Mounted must—was acclimatized, had friends in Prince Albert, the nearest town, and liked the semi-hermit life that I elected to lead. I was resolved to go it alone, and so Jim and I got right down to brass tacks.

THE first thing I did was to get out a set of house logs and a load of dressed lumber, doors, windows, and so forth. The logs I cut near my own land; the lumber I had to haul thirty miles from town. Before the first snow flew, my house and stable were finished. I had dug a good well, broken ten acres and had a liberal supply of firewood on hand. A team of horses, and a couple of heifers, comprised my livestock. Jim was my society. After snow fell I devoted my attention to trapping and fishing.

Winter fishing on Little Trout Lake, about ten miles from my homestead, is not a very sportsmanlike occupation. You simply stick up a tent on the ice, cut a hole and shove in a net. The fish come readily to this ventilator, are caught in the net, dragged out of the water by hand and thrown onto the ice, where they soon freeze solid. This is far from a pleasant operation, as anyone who has tried it will acknowledge.

Between fur and fish I realized a nice little sum for my winter's work, and was able, when I went to town in the spring, to lay in supplies sufficient to last me all summer and greatly to increase my stock of cattle and implements. I not only cropped the ten acres I had previously broken, but broke and disked ten acres more that summer, besides putting up a new log stable large enough to accommodate two teams of horses and ten head of cattle. It was while engaged on this building that I met with the accident that, but for the intelligence of Jim, must have cost me my life.

A log building, as everybody who has attempted it knows, is not an easy undertaking for one man alone. The cutting, hauling and hewing of the logs is no very difficult matter, of course, but when you come to hoist them one upon another, you will wish you had some one to handle the other end.

I tried to get help but was disappointed, and not to be beaten, determined to try it alone. One afternoon I had gotten pretty near to the last log and was congratulating myself that the worst of the job was over, when, without any warning, the rope I was using as a pulley suddenly snapped and the

log I was working on fell, crushing my left leg beneath it, and pinning me helplessly to the ground. For some minutes I was so stunned by the shock that I did not realize what had happened. A thousand fantastic thoughts flashed through my mind and I opened my eyes to find my faithful dog licking my face and uttering gasping, whining noises by way of expressing sympathy. I felt no pain but was powerless to move; the heavy log held my leg as if in a vise, though my right leg was free, as were also both arms. Yet, I was held in such a position that all the strength I could muster failed to move the log half an inch. Whether or not my leg was broken I could not tell until the log was removed. How that was to be done I did not know.

My first impulse was to "holler."

Then came to me with a new meaning the Scriptural injunction that "It is not good for man to be alone." I realized that I was very much alone and the chances of anyone coming to my assistance was as one in a thousand. I had not seen a human being for many days, my homestead being miles off the trail that led to the lumber-camps, and as I said before, I had no near neighbors. I shuddered as the thought gripped me that I might lie there until I starved to death, a prey to the prowling wolves against whom I was powerless to put up any kind of a fight for my life.

AS this dreadful thought struck me, I glanced helplessly around. My ax lay some little distance away. If I could only reach it! But I might as well have tried to reach the moon. Suddenly I thought of the dog. Poor Jim was sitting on his stumpy tail looking into my face and whining miserably as if in sympathy with my suffering. I had taught him to fetch and carry, to bring the ducks I had shot out of the water, and at this he was as expert as any retriever. If I could only get him to bring the ax within reach! I patted his head, and he leaped upon me eagerly, uttering little barks of joy. I pointed toward the ax and told him to fetch it. He ran off at once in the direction indicated. "Good boy," I called. "The ax—fetch it, Jim!"

He ran around in a circle a few times; then, seeing my whip, which I had thrown beside the wagon when I unhitched the team at noon, he pounced upon that and carried it proudly in his mouth to my side and dropped it.

"No, no," I cried, "go back. The ax, Jim—fetch it, good dog!"

Away he trotted again and returned with one of my gauntlets, which lay right on the ax-handle. I sent him back again with a cuff on the ear; he took the ax-handle between his teeth and dragged it a little way—dropped it and came bounding back with the other gauntlet.

I was so disappointed that I hit the poor animal over the head with the butt of the whip. He gave a little howl of pain, and retreating some distance, sat down with a reproachful look toward me that cut me to the heart. Then I called him to me again, petted and stroked him for a while, and went through the motions of chopping with an ax, but for a long time he did not seem to understand. I kept pointing and shouting: "The ax—fetch it," when all of a sudden he bounded away with a loud bark, seized the ax-handle with his teeth, and dragging it inch by inch, dropped it at my feet.

GETTING to a sitting posture I soon made the chips fly, while Jim danced around me barking with delight. It was not long before I had cut the log in two, as near my imprisoned leg as I dared, and it was then an easy matter, using the ax-handle as a lever, to pry it free. But my plight was still a desperate one, for when I tried to move, I found, as I expected, that my leg was broken a little above the ankle.

I had a smattering of surgery, having been instructed in "first aid to the wounded," which is part of the education of a Mounted Policeman; this stood me in good stead in this emergency. Having the ax, I was able to fashion a few rude splints with which, by the aid of strips torn from my shirt, I contrived to set and bandage the fracture.

This having been accomplished, I essayed to crawl toward the shack, which stood at no great distance; but the pain I endured in the passage forced many a groan from between my set teeth—Jim licking my hands and face every time I was forced to stop from pain and exhaustion. At last, however, I managed to reach the door and crawled within. My cot was a low wire spring affair, and I just managed to drag myself to it when, for the first time in my life, I fainted. . . .

How long I remained unconscious I do not know. When I awoke, the moon was shining in at my open door, and Jim lay

asleep by my side. It must have been cold with the door wide open, but as I did not feel it, I must have been very feverish. I know I longed for a drink of water but was quite unable to move. My leg felt as if paralyzed and I lay there on my back until daylight trying to figure a way out. I must have help or I should undoubtedly cash in, as they say in the West. For that purpose it was necessary to get word to town, or to some one who could come to my assistance; but how was I to send word? That was the puzzle, and again I felt that it was not good for man to be alone.

Then I thought of the dog. Jim had already saved my life once; could he do so again? I resolved to try him—it was my one and only chance; and so, when it was light enough to see, I found the back of an old letter and the stump of a carpenter's pencil in my waistcoat pocket, for I had not been able to remove my clothes. I managed to write and sign an appeal for help, describing my condition and the location of my homestead. This I wrapped in a piece of my torn shirt and tied the packet around Jim's neck, fastening it to his collar in such a way as would readily attract attention, yet at the same time not be likely to come loose. In such an event, though, I believed the intelligent brute would have taken the packet in his mouth and laid it at the feet of the first person he met.

I did not doubt that help would come; if my appeal was received, even by an Indian, he would be sure to take it to the nearest agency or Police post, even if he did not understand a word of the writing. I had very little hope, of course, that my four-footed messenger could be made to understand what I wanted him to do—but I had no other resource.

BEFORE driving him away I repeated often, the two words, "George" and "Home," at the same time pointing through the open door in the direction of the trail to town. George was my old troop chum, and was just about as fond of the dog as I was.

For a long time I could not get Jim to leave me, until I sat up in bed, pretending to be very angry, and threw my boots at him. Then he trotted away a few hundred yards, stopped and looked back expectantly; but when, instead of calling him back, I again yelled "Go home" in the fiercest voice I could assume, he reluctantly started on again, and finally disappeared.

FOR a long time I expected every minute to see my faithful companion poke his head into the door again, but as hour after hour went by and there was no sign of his return, I was forced to the joyful conclusion that he had indeed understood what was wanted of him, and was on his way to bring help.

How I got through that terrible day I do not know. I had had nothing to eat or drink for about thirty hours; my head was aching excruciatingly; my throat was parched and burning, and I knew I was in a high state of fever. Looking back afterward, I believe I must have been suffering from delirium.

At length darkness settled down, and I knew the dog must have gone on, or he would have been back long ago. Then I racked my brain trying to figure out how long it would be before help could come. Toward morning I thought I heard a dog barking in the distance, but put it down to a disordered brain, for my head continued to ache most dreadfully and my tongue seemed to be too large for my mouth. Then I fell asleep, and dreamed that poor old Jim was sitting on my chest crushing the life out of me.

In my struggle to throw him off I awoke. It was broad daylight, and the first object I saw was Jim standing on his hindlegs with his forepaws on the edge of my cot, licking my face as he used to do when he thought it was near Reveille and time for me to get up.

But my joy at seeing him was turned to fury when my eyes lighted upon his collar. There was my desperate appeal for help tied around his neck just as it was when I had sent him forth! I wrenched the packet away, almost choking him in my rage, and

with a piece of wood I picked off the floor I dealt him a blow on the head that stretched the poor dog senseless.

I was mad with fever or I never would have done it. I sat staring at the packet in my hand, and was just about to tear the paper up and cast it away when I noticed the writing was in ink and in a neat clerkly hand, whereas I had written with a broad carpenter's pencil. For a moment, in my semidelirious condition, I was lost in wonder at this transformation; then suddenly the truth flashed upon me. Tremblingly, I smoothed the paper out, and this is what I read: "*Cheer up, old chap. We are starting to bring you help as soon as we can round up the doc. On the off chance that he may reach you before we do, I am sending this back by old Jim.—George.*"

"My God!" I cried in sorrow, as I reached over, gathered the faithful dog up in my arms and kissed his cold muzzle. "Poor old Jim, you saved my life twice in forty-eight hours, and I rewarded you with a blow like that!"

WHEN the doctor and two Mounted Policemen drove up an hour later, they found me delirious, with the dog in my arms licking away my tears, while I kissed and cried over him, they said, as if he had been a child.

I may add that I got well and secured the title to my homestead in due time, that old Jim helped me to put in my residence duties; and when he died a few years ago, of old age, I put up a slab at his grave inscribed as follows:

JIM

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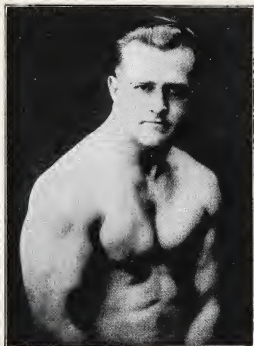
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